



**Senator Peter Welch
Opening Remarks as Delivered**

**Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on The Constitution Hearing
Ending Illegal DEI Discrimination & Preferences: Enforcing Our Civil Rights Laws
July 23, 2025**

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate you calling this hearing. The questions before us are absolutely profound. They're being tested and litigated and they're being contested politically. The question before this Congress is whether we're going to save the Civil Rights Division, or we're going to destroy it.

And I want to step back just a moment. The Civil Rights Division is a crown jewel in the Department of Justice of the United States of America. It was founded in 1957. It was founded by a Republican President, Dwight D. Eisenhower. It was when we were beginning to come out of the dark days of legalized discrimination—the Jim Crow Laws in the South, lynchings, denial of voting rights, discrimination in housing.

The Congress began slowly to address this with laws. The Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice, in a very turbulent time, had the responsibility to enforce the laws. The laws of the Congress that were passed by Congress, not the prerogatives of the President. And it did extraordinary work then, as it is doing now.

They investigated assassinations of Martin Luther King; Medgar Evers. They brought landmark cases to desegregate school districts in the South—against bitter opposition—to allow the decision that separate but equal would not stand. It also took the lead in making voting a reality for folks who couldn't vote.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I began my career—and I guess it's in politics—because of the Civil Rights Era. I went to Chicago and was a community organizer, and I was shocked as a young man to see that Black folks in the West side of Chicago, in Lawndale—who had two jobs, who were struggling to pay their bills, who were looking to make their schools better—they couldn't buy a house and get a mortgage.

It was legal for the banks to deny them a mortgage. It was legal for the Veterans Affairs Department to deny folks who served as soldiers in World War II to get a VA guarantee. It was legal under the Illinois law to evict folks who were paying on contract to buy a home. But if they missed a payment after ten years—because somebody got

sick, or you got laid off from your job—legally, they could have their entire house taken back and have no equity. And it was Civil Rights Division folks who were in there fighting for the rights of those Americans.

That battle continues and that's what we're going to be testifying about today. But the most important thing that we have to remember is that there was a Congressional responsibility to establish laws about what rights individuals had—regardless of their race, their gender, their sexual orientation. And those were the laws that were enforced by the Department of Justice through the Civil Rights Division.

And I am so indebted to those lawyers who made a decision, oftentimes to say no to a career on Wall Street, or K street, or Market Street in San Francisco, and to be here in the Justice Department to advocate and represent the rights of citizens as those were defined by the Congress of the United States.

It's a new day, and our witness here is going to testify. I look forward to hearing what her testimony is. But there's a profound difference in the Justice Department today than there was the day before the election. And that is the new policy directives that are being issued to DOJ attorneys is the zealous and faithful pursuit that, "The priorities of the President."

No! It's the priorities of the Constitution. It's the priorities of the legislation passed by Congress. It is *not* the priorities of any person, even if that person is the President of the United States. That is not what the job of the Justice Department is to do.

So today, Mr. Chairman, I so appreciate your statement, you're engaging this issue. But I am going to have to say we're going to have some disagreement along the way. Thank you, I yield back.

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