

**REMARKS BY JANET MURGUIA, NCLR PRESIDENT AND  
CEO, REGARDING THE NOMINATION OF U.S. SEN. JEFF  
SESSIONS AS ATTORNEY GENERAL**

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Thank you for the opportunity to be with you here today. First, I want to echo my colleagues' statements about the centrality of the attorney general's role in the lives of the communities we represent. The attorney general has the mandate and the ability to affect those lives every single day in ways that can be helpful, but also harmful.

It is for that reason that, despite the fact that we believe the president should have wide latitude in his cabinet choices, we strongly oppose the nomination of Sen. Jeff Sessions as attorney general.

You will hear on this call about the many, many issues of concern to the civil rights community where Sen. Sessions has a very troubling record. NCLR is most familiar with Sen. Sessions' extremist position on immigration, perhaps the most extreme anti-immigrant record of any U.S. senator. It is no wonder that his nomination has been hailed by nativist and anti-immigrant extremist organizations.

But what is also striking about Sen. Sessions is how he has—in his words and actions—reinforced what the Senate Judiciary Committee said about him 30 years ago, what they termed as his record of “racial insensitivity.”

We have seen examples of this insensitivity, a lack of empathy, and even what we believe is his hostility toward our community often over his years in the Senate.

Ten years ago, he said that Dominican immigrants coming to the United States had no “provable skill that would benefit us.” He apparently never heard of Oscar de la Renta, David “Big Papi” Ortiz, or the son of Dominican immigrants, Secretary of Labor Tom Perez.

Five years ago, Alabama passed its infamous and draconian anti-immigrant law, HB 56, where children were required to prove their immigration status to go to school, prompting a wave of fear and harassment against Hispanic kids in the state.

We even heard one case of an elementary school teacher lining up her students against a wall and asking them about their “papers.”

Yet when asked about whether what these children were experiencing was sad to him, Sessions essentially replied that he thought it was actually sad that these kids and their families were here in the first place. So, Sen. Sessions, have you nothing to say to the children in that classroom?

This past summer, Sessions fought tooth and nail against plans to place 2000 unaccompanied minors from Central America in Alabama. He said that he did not want “these illegals” in his state. Remember that these are children who fled hellish conditions and trekked across several countries by themselves in hopes of finding refuge in this country. Yet Sessions could not muster any sense of compassion or understanding of their plight.

And this track record of hostility is not limited just to those Sessions considers immigrants. The foremost example was his reprehensible treatment of Justice Sonia Sotomayor during her confirmation process.

Sessions did not just immediately oppose her nomination, he led the Senate's opposition to her. In short, he stated that he did not believe that—despite decades of evidence to the contrary— Justice Sotomayor could be impartial because she had said she was a “wise Latina.”

That sounds eerily familiar to what President-elect Trump said last June about Judge Gonzalo Curiel, a distinguished American-born judge of Mexican descent.

Like Trump did with Curiel, Sessions questioned Sotomayor relentlessly on any speech in which she made reference to her background and ethnicity, as if this was somehow disqualifying. Yet those speeches were actually part of an inspirational message to the audiences she was often addressing: young Latino/Latina law students who saw her as a role model and mentor.

I myself had an experience with Sen. Sessions when I testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on comprehensive immigration reform a few years ago. The senator referred to me as the representative of a “special interest group.” In other words, he sees the 60 million Latinos in this country as a special interest group, not as what we are—a part of the fabric of this country. And that is concerning.

We need an attorney general who understands the experiences of all Americans, not one who sees our communities as un-American. We need an attorney general who has shown that he believes in equal treatment and full rights for all, not just for some. We need an attorney general who protects those rights with the full force of his office, not continues to put a bullseye on the backs of vulnerable communities.

And time and again, Sen. Sessions has demonstrated that he is clearly not that person.