

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 30, 2016

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

We write to express our deep concern about the harassment and intimidation of people in Oregon and across this country based on their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics. We urge you to continue to investigate all instances of such behavior and to hold perpetrators accountable for any illegal actions. It is critical that the Department of Justice (DOJ) fulfill its duty to ensure public safety and justice for all Americans.

As you know, the recent election cycle was characterized by a disturbing level of animosity directed at racial, ethnic, religious and other minority groups. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) recently released 2015 Hate Crimes Statistics detail nearly 6,000 hate crimes in 2015, an increase of 7% over the previous year. These numbers include a 67% increase in attacks against Muslims, a 9% increase in anti-Jewish hate crimes, an 8% increase in crimes against African Americans and a 5% increase in crimes against LGBTQ individuals. These attacks do not appear to have abated in the wake of a highly divisive presidential election. Indeed, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has reported over 700 cases of hateful harassment or intimidation since Election Day.

In our home state of Oregon, a group of students at one high school proposed establishing a "Klu Klux Klub" to sacrifice African Americans students, and students at another chanted racial slurs and anti-immigrant rhetoric at Hispanic students. Muslim Americans have been threatened on public transportation, and African American students at the University of Oregon left a meeting to encounter others jeering in blackface. These are only a few of the many incidents that we have been informed of in Oregon.


Time and time again, minority groups have warned that hateful rhetoric contributes to a culture of intimidation and violence. Many are now questioning their government's basic commitment to equal protection under the law in the months and years to come. The nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to lead the DOJ calls into question President-elect Trump's commitment to protecting all Americans from hate motivated violence, and to enforcing the rule of law. We urge you to use your remaining time as Attorney General to continue pushing back against the ugly trends of division and discrimination.

We will continue to fight for the rule of law in the U.S. Senate, regardless of who serves as Attorney General. We urge you to do all that you can to embolden the entire DOJ, particularly the FBI, to protect the public and ensure the fair administration of justice for all Americans.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator