



The Washington Report

The Newsletter of the National Association of Police Organizations

March 18, 2013

NAPO WASHINGTON REPORT FLASH

BREAKING NEWS OBAMA TO NOMINATE PEREZ TO SEC DOL

(combined reports from multiple sources, including NAPO, Washington Post and Politico)

President Obama will formally nominate assistant U.S. Attorney General Thomas E. Perez as the next labor secretary on Monday. Administration officials described Perez as a “pragmatic leader and consensus builder” who oversaw the division that settled three major fair-lending cases and increased the enforcement of human trafficking laws. Perez, who was Maryland’s state labor secretary under Gov. Martin O’Malley (D) from 2007 to 2009, has served in county, state and federal government.

But Perez’s expected nomination, which must be confirmed by the Senate, has drawn criticism from Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa). In a statement, Grassley said that if Perez is nominated, “he should face a lot of tough questions” about the Justice Department’s role in a decision last year by St. Paul, Minn., to withdraw a housing discrimination case that was before the Supreme Court.

The Civil Rights Division also conducted 17 investigations of police and sheriff’s departments, the most in its 54-year history.

One of them involved the nation’s self-proclaimed toughest sheriff, Joe Arpaio of Arizona’s Maricopa County. The Justice Department sued him, his office and the county last year for civil rights violations after months of negotiations failed to yield an agreement to settle allegations that his department racially profiled Latinos in immigration patrols. Perez could face questions during his nomination over a critical Inspector General report last week that found the department’s voting rights section mired in deep ideological polarization and distrust, in some cases harming its ability to function over the past two administrations.

The investigation of the section started after Reps. Frank R. Wolf (R-Va.) and Lamar Smith (R-Tex.) sent letters to the inspector general questioning the department’s handling of a case involving the New Black Panther Party. On Jan. 7, 2009, the Justice Department sued the group and several members for alleged voter intimidation. After the Obama administration came into office two weeks later, the department asked that the case against three of the four defendants be dismissed.

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