

JUSTICE NEWS

Opening Statement of Attorney General Jeff Sessions Before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Washington, DC ~ Wednesday, April 25, 2018

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Shaheen, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee—my friends and former colleagues—thank you for this opportunity.

I am pleased also to congratulate Senator Shelby on being chosen to chair this historic committee.

It is the honor of a lifetime to serve as the Attorney General of the United States and to sit here representing the men and women of the Department of Justice.

You can be sure that I understand the importance of the office I hold and strive to be worthy of it.

Every single day, the 115,000 men and women of the Department of Justice work to protect our national security against terrorist threats, to defend the civil rights of all Americans, to reduce violent crime in our communities, to stop deadly drug dealers and their organizations, and to strengthen the rule of law.

Today, I would like to lay out some of the priorities reflected in our budget request.

First of all, this Department has rapidly moved to improve partnerships with the 85 percent of law enforcement officers who serve at the state, local, and tribal levels. We know that we cannot succeed at making America safer without them.

And yesterday, we were once again reminded of the sacrifice we ask of our men and women in blue. Officers Crystal Almeida and Rogelio Santander responded to a routine call at a Home Depot in Dallas, but they did not return home. And today, we mourn with the family of Officer Santander and pray for the recovery of Officer Almeida. The men and women of law enforcement deserve our respect. They deserve our support. And they deserve our commitment to reduce crime in America.

After two decades of declining crime, in 2015 and 2016, the violent crime rate went up by nearly seven percent; assaults went up nearly 10 percent; rape went up by nearly 11 percent; murder increased by more than 20 percent.

President Trump, our federal officers, and our local law enforcement partners are determined that this crime rise will not continue.

Our prosecutions of illicit drugs, gun violators, violent crime, gangs, opioids, and immigration offenses are going up also.

In 2017, we brought cases against more violent criminals than in any year in decades.

We charged the most federal firearms prosecutions in a decade.

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We convicted nearly 500 human traffickers and 1,200 gang members.

Your strong support for our work means we can sustain our Project Safe Neighborhood (PSN) program where our United States Attorneys will meet with community leaders and develop a crime-reduction plan based on the local needs. This is a program that has been proven and will work.

Indeed, there are some good signs in the preliminary data that the increases in murder and violent crime appear to have slowed and violent crime may have actually begun to decrease.

We also embrace the President's goal of reducing prescription drugs sold in the United States by one-third over the next three years. This is an important step in reducing addiction and overdose deaths.

We are simply prescribing too many drugs in this country. This Department is going after drug companies, doctors, and pharmacists and others that violate the law using civil, criminal, and sound regulatory powers.

I have directed that every US Attorney Office establish an opioid coordinator.

We have already charged hundreds of people suspected of contributing to the ongoing opioid crisis—including over 50 doctors for opioid-related crimes. Sixteen of these doctors prescribed more than 20.3 million pills illegally. Our Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Forces have also indicted more than 6,500 defendants in opioid-related investigations and forfeited more than \$150 million.

With powerful drugs like fentanyl and heroin on our streets, we are experiencing overdose death rates like we have never seen in this country. It must end. We are out of time—we have to see results now.

Amazingly, in the past month alone, the DEA has seized a total of more than 90 kilograms of suspected fentanyl in cases from Detroit to New York to Boston. Fentanyl is 50 times as powerful as heroin, and it's so powerful that an amount equivalent to a pinch of salt is powerful enough to be deadly.

We must acknowledge that the vast majority of fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine first came across our Southern border.

And we are working with our DHS partners to reduce and ultimately end illegal immigration—which will also help us take on transnational criminal organizations and reduce the drugs pouring across our border.

We are streamlining and increasing prosecutions and targeting criminal aliens.

Congress provided enough funding for 100 new immigration judges in the recent omnibus, which will help us keep up with the caseload.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to address one matter that I know is important to the Committee: the Legal Orientation Program. I have expressed some concerns about the program, and the Executive Office for Immigration Review has expressed its intent to pause two parts of the program pending the results of a formal review of the program. I recognize, however, that the Committee has spoken on this matter, and, out of deference to the Committee, I have ordered there be no pause while that review is conducted. I look forward to evaluating the findings and will be in communication with the Committee when they are available.

Our explicit goals for the Department of Justice are to reduce violent crime, reduce the surging increase in homicides, reduce drug overdose deaths, and to reduce opioid prescriptions.

I believe that these priorities are also the priorities of the American people.

Finally, let me say with all the strength I can muster, that no nation has a finer group of law officers than those who

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comprise our FBI, DEA, ATF, and USMS. They are—now and 24 hours a day— in every corner of America, working courageously and faithfully to protect this nation and our people.

When we face criticism, we will not be defensive. When questions arise, even if misplaced, we will take necessary action to establish that the concerns are either not true or take strong action against any wrongdoing. This Department — above all others— can never get too big for its britches or think itself in anyway as above the law that we must apply to others. We know the government always wins when justice is done.

Mr. Chairman, I am looking forward to discussing these matters with you today.

Speaker:

Attorney General Jeff Sessions

Component(s):

Office of the Attorney General

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