

JUSTICE NEWS

Attorney General Sessions Delivers Remarks on Immigration Enforcement

Las Cruces, NM ~ Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Thank you, Sheriff Martinez, for that introduction, for your leadership as Chairman of this Coalition, and for your 40 years in law enforcement.

Thank you also to Clint McDonald of Terrell County, Texas, Larry Guerra of El Paso, and my friends Harold Eavenson and Jonathan Thompson. I also want to thank Sheriff Leon Wilmot and Sheriff Mark Dannels, both whom have shared their experiences and insights in Washington on numerous occasions. Mark, you've been one of the strongest advocates for a secure border, and I want to thank you for that.

It is an honor to be with all 31 of our sheriffs from San Diego to Brownsville.

I just had the opportunity to visit the U.S. Attorney's office in Albuquerque. This afternoon I'll be visiting the U.S. Attorney's office here in Las Cruces. Thanks for the invitation to visit with you.

I understand that you heard from Steve Cook yesterday. He is a tough act to follow. I hope you all got a chance to meet him. He is the Director of our Office of Law Enforcement Liaison, and an important part of my team that ensures we are serving our law enforcement partners and growing those relationships.

On behalf of President Trump, I want to thank each and every one of you for your service to this country. We've got your back.

We recognize that you are the thin blue line that stands between law-abiding people and criminals – between a family's security and lawlessness. You protect us and our communities, and you secure our country from drugs and violence.

And I think this group is particularly important. Everything that happens on our border affects the entire country.

A 2,000 mile border leaves this country vulnerable to transnational criminal organizations like drug cartels, violent street gangs like MS-13, human traffickers, and other criminals who bring drugs, guns, and gang violence into our communities.

Most of the heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and fentanyl in this country was not made here. It came here across the border. These are the deadliest drugs this country has ever seen—and they are killing more Americans than ever before. From coast to coast, people are dying from drugs that were brought over this border.

Wearing the badge anywhere takes courage. But officers on the border face a unique set of challenges. You have limited resources. You need manpower and equipment. And you face violent and dangerous threats every day.

We have a crisis at the border.

Last month, we saw a significant increase in illegal border crossings from the lows we saw last year. We saw a steep drop after President Trump's inauguration with record low illegal crossings for most of his first summer in office. But now illegal entries have begun increasing again.

Some of it could simply be the Trump economy, which has been booming. It's no surprise that the lure of employment

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is a magnet for illegal immigration.

The lack of a wall on the southern border is an open invitation to illegal border crossings. The failure of Congress to move on the wall and to take other necessary steps is sending a message of irresolution and uncertainty.

But the increased crossings are also happening because of the loopholes in our laws being exploited by illegal aliens and open border radicals every day.

For example, the last Administration released large numbers of illegal aliens who illegally crossed our border, but who claimed that they were afraid to return home. Unsurprisingly, the exploitation of this “credible fear” loophole exploded.

After their release from custody, a large number of these aliens simply disappeared—never showing up for their hearings in immigration court. The vast majority who did show up had their asylum claims denied—although in many cases years after their illegal entry into the United States. The claims were denied because the claims were not justified.

Many smugglers and transnational criminal organizations have also been exploiting another loophole in our immigration laws that pertains to the ability to quickly return purported “unaccompanied alien children” back to their home countries after they illegally enter the United States.

We can return UACs from Canada and Mexico relatively quickly—but because of loopholes in our laws, the large numbers of UACs from Central America are not able to be returned quickly. Instead they are released into the interior of the United States.

They know this, of course, and that is why so many of these children are flooding across our border. They know that they can take advantage of our system.

That frustrates and undermines the work of our Customs and Border Protection Officers. And it has terrible consequences for this country.

For example, in just four days at the end of March, Customs and Border Protection apprehended five juveniles who were allegedly smuggling killer fentanyl across the border. Between the five of them, they allegedly had more than 16 kilograms of fentanyl—enough to kill millions of people. One of them also carried enough cocaine to kill thousands.

I could go on. There are many more stories like these—not to mention the countless deaths from drug overdoses—stories that show, every day, the real consequences of the illegality at our border.

It is unacceptable. It cannot continue. No one can honestly defend that status quo.

We are a strong, prosperous, and orderly nation. And such a nation must have a lawful system of immigration.

Nations must have borders.

But let no one contend that we reject immigration and want to “wall off America” from all lawful immigration. Such arguments are totally false.

Every year, we grant lawful permanent resident status—green cards—to 1.1 million aliens.

It is only reasonable that the good and decent people of this country want to end the illegality, create a rational immigration flow, and protect the nation from criminals.

The American people have demanded this of Congress for more than 30 years.

Law enforcement officers have been asking for the same thing. Last month, nearly 400 sheriffs from across America

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sent a letter to Congress asking them to finally secure the border and take action against sanctuary policies.

It cannot be that someone who illegally crosses the border on Monday and makes it to Albuquerque or Santa Fe on Tuesday is home free—never to be removed.

It cannot be that a great nation rewards those who unlawfully enter its country with legal status, Social Security, welfare, food stamps, and work permits.

The first thing we should do to end the illegality is to stop rewarding it.

The United States of America is not an idea—we are a nation. We have a Constitution, laws, and borders, all of which are designed to protect our nation's interests.

Most Americans get this. They are working hard to make ends meet, follow the rules, and try to keep their loved ones safe.

Under President Trump, we've seen wages increase at the fastest pace in a decade. And we can already hear the open borders crowd—and certain sectors of the business lobby—starting to complain. But we absolutely must not flood the labor market with foreign workers—legal or illegal—in order to bring wages down.

Our citizens want our government to think about them for a change. They have dreams too.

With President Trump, we have a new era of support for law enforcement like we haven't seen in a long time. You might even say we have a new sheriff in town.

Under President Trump's strong leadership, we have taken a number of steps to make your jobs easier by taking criminals off the streets and by restoring the rule of law to our immigration system.

First of all, the President has ordered the Department of Defense to work with the Department of Homeland Security to secure our border.

Second, the Department of Justice is taking actions to bring down the 680,000-plus case backlog in our immigration courts.

That includes a surge last year of more than 100 immigration judges to our southern border. And we are actively working with our partners at DHS to ensure that we can deploy judges electronically and by video-teleconference to efficiently handle more cases in the near future.

I have made it clear to these judges that we expect them to complete cases quickly and efficiently. Not to put them on hold—but to complete them. We are now directing them to complete at least 700 cases a year. This is about average. This is not a radical goal, but a rational policy to ensure consistency, accountability, and efficiency to our immigration court system.

Third, we have appointed a Border Security Coordinator in each U.S. Attorney's Office, each of whom carry a number of responsibilities to ensure the restoration of the rule of law in our immigration system.

Fourth, we have gone to court with the biggest sanctuary jurisdiction in America—the state of California.

We cannot allow states, cities, or counties to violate federal law. Sanctuary policies hinder the work of federal law enforcement; they're contrary to the rule of law, and they have serious consequences for the law-abiding people.

Cities, states, and counties that knowingly, willfully, and purposefully release criminal aliens back into their communities are sacrificing the lives and safety of American citizens in the pursuit of an extreme open borders policy. If a jurisdiction won't accept the deportation of someone who enters illegally and then commits another crime—then who do they think

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should be deported?

We are not asking you or anybody else to enforce our immigration laws for us. Our ICE agents do incredible work every day. But we welcome your voluntary cooperation, and I encourage you to consider joining the effective 287(g) program with our partners at ICE.

We are determined to finally end “catch and release.” On Friday, President Trump ordered me to report to him on what we have done—and what we can do in the future—to fix this broken system.

That same day, I ordered a change to Department criminal prosecution policies on for those who enter our country illegally.

I have ordered each United States Attorney’s Office along the southwest border to have a zero tolerance policy toward illegal entry. Our goal is to prosecute every case that is brought to us. There must be consequences for illegal actions, and I am confident in the ability of our federal prosecutors to carry out this new mission.

Our team here in New Mexico has already demonstrated its effectiveness over the last year or so, with illegal entry prosecutions increasing sevenfold in just one year, and continuing to increase in 2018.

Making this our national policy sends a clear message: if you break into this country, we will prosecute you.

That will deter thousands of illegal aliens.

But there is still much for us to do.

Ultimately, ending illegal immigration will require action from Congress. And if Congress wanted to, they could end illegal immigration tomorrow.

It’s time for Congress to finally take action. A great nation cannot allow this lawless disgrace to continue any longer. The sheriffs in this room deserve better.

I want to close by reiterating my deep appreciation and profound thanks to all of our sheriffs. Since even before our founding, the independently elected Sheriff has been seen as the people’s protector, keeping law enforcement close to and amenable to the people.

The work that you do – that you have dedicated your lives to – is essential. I believe it. The Department of Justice believes it. And President Trump believes it.

You can be certain about this: we have your back and you have our thanks.

Speaker:

Attorney General Jeff Sessions

Topic(s):

Immigration

Component(s):

Executive Office for Immigration Review

Office of the Attorney General

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