

**Chairman Richard Shelby Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to Review the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request
for the U.S. Department of Justice**

June 13, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Mr. Deputy Attorney General, welcome to the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee hearing examining the Department of Justice's Fiscal Year 2018 budget request.

I am pleased to welcome you to your first hearing before this subcommittee, and I am grateful that you and Attorney General Sessions have brought new, desperately-needed leadership to the DOJ.

Your input is helpful and necessary as we review the President's spending priorities for the Justice Department in order to ensure that the country's national security and law enforcement needs are funded appropriately and sufficiently.

This is a challenging budget climate. As violent crime has risen and terrorist threats have escalated, fiscal constraints have tightened.

The President proposes to decrease spending at the Department of Justice by \$637 million in fiscal year 2018, for a new total of \$28.3 billion.

Since the start of this new administration and during these early days of your tenure as the Deputy Attorney General, I am pleased that the Department is refocusing on its core mission of enforcing our nation's Constitution and duly enacted laws.

It is critical that we target our finite law enforcement resources towards the worst criminals in our society, and I agree with the Attorney General's directive to federal prosecutors to go after the most violent offenders.

Additionally, the importance of prosecuting violent crime is reflected in the President's budget request for 230 new assistant U.S. attorneys to address this growing problem.

This re-ordering of priorities was further underscored by the Attorney General's reversal of the Obama Administration's lenient charging and sentencing policies, requiring federal prosecutors now to pursue the most serious charges and sentences possible.

In particular, a stronger federal law enforcement approach towards drug crimes is critical, and this is a key area where we hope to see results from more stringent prosecution and sentencing.

The heroin and opioid crisis is fueled by drug traffickers who must be brought to justice under the law.

The Department has also refocused on the critical problem of illegal immigration, making it a priority for prosecutors and empowering them to bring felony charges whenever permissible under law.

Illegal immigration has become one of the most critical problems facing our nation, so it is encouraging to learn that President Trump's tough approach is already resulting in reduced illegal border crossings.

To back up this newfound emphasis on tackling illegal immigration, the budget request seeks 40 deputy U.S. Marshals to address the criminal alien problem, 70 additional border enforcement prosecutors, 20 attorneys and support staff to handle civil condemnation work for the Southwest border wall, and 20 attorneys and support staff for immigration litigation assistance.

I can assure you that this subcommittee will give careful consideration to these requested positions.

I also appreciate the Department's related efforts to place immigration judges in jurisdictions where they are most needed and to quickly hire the immigration judges which this subcommittee has previously funded.

Over the last eight years, dozens of these benches have gone unfilled due to the former Administration's failure to act.

In the meantime, the backlog of immigration cases has grown to a staggering number of 600,000.

The proposed budget seeks an increase of \$65 million for the Executive Office for Immigration Review to hire another 65 immigration judge teams on top of the 10 that were just provided in the fiscal year 2017 Omnibus.

We will closely review the details of this request to balance the tremendous need with the restrictive budget environment we are facing.

I trust that the recent establishment of the Department's Task Force on Crime Reduction and Public Safety will continue to provide new ideas and recommendations on how our nation can best combat violent crime, illegal immigration, and other law enforcement challenges.

Cybersecurity and counterterrorism remain two of my top national security concerns, and I will want to know more about how this budget supports the Department's efforts in these critical fields.

Thank you for your important testimony today as this subcommittee begins our work on the fiscal year 2018 budget for the Department of Justice.

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