

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS ADDRESSES RECENT CRITICISMS OF ZERO TOLERANCE BY CHURCH LEADERS

Fort Wayne, IN

First- illegal entry into the United States is a crime—as it should be. Persons who violate the law of our nation are subject to prosecution. I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order.

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thank you, Tom for that kind introduction; thank you for your eight years of service to the Department of Justice, and congratulations on your appointment as United States Attorney.

Thank you to the Fort Wayne Rotary Club, the Fort Wayne Business Forum, the Allan County Bar Association—and most of all thank you to law enforcement officers from the federal, state, and local levels.

Thank you all for being here.

It is good to be back in the Hoosier state. On my previous trip, I enjoyed being with your dedicated and professional Attorney General Curtis Hill as we explored the 10 Point Coalition neighborhood.

This is an exciting and important time. We have an historic opportunity to—finally—fix an immigration system that has been broken for decades.

The American people have been begging and pleading with our elected officials for an immigration system that is lawful and that serves our national interest—one that we can be proud of. There is nothing mean-spirited about that. They are right, decent and just to ask for this.

But for more than a decade now, the elites and Washington insiders have prioritized the interests of certain corporate interests and activist groups over what is best for the American people.

Beginning in 2009, the previous Administration released most aliens apprehended at the border who requested asylum into the United States with a document asking them to show up for a hearing at some later date. Word spread quickly that by asserting a fear of returning to one's home country, one could remain in the United States.

The results are just what one would expect. The number of illegal entrants has surged. Asylum claims skyrocketed, and the percentage of meritorious asylum claims— those actually granted— declined.

That's because the vast majority of the claims are not valid. For the last five years, only 20 percent of claims have been found to be meritorious after a hearing before an Immigration Judge. In addition, some fifteen percent are found invalid by during the initial screening by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

In addition, in 2009, the Department of Homeland Security reviewed more than 5,000 initial asylum screenings. By 2016, only seven years later, that number had increased to 94,000. The number of these aliens placed in immigration court proceedings went from fewer than 4,000 to more than 73,000 by 2016— nearly a 19-fold increase.

This cannot continue.

Compounding this problem, the previous administration wouldn't prosecute illegal aliens who entered the country with children. It was de facto open borders.

The results were unsurprising. More and more illegal aliens started showing up at the border with children. To illustrate, in 2013, there were fewer than 15,000 family units apprehended crossing our border illegally between ports of entry. Five years later, it was more than 75,000—a five-fold increase in five years. It didn't even have to be their child—it could be anyone. You can imagine the horrible abuses that resulted.

The open borders, pro-amnesty crowd encouraged that—and they have the gall to attack those of us who want to end this lawlessness and the dangers these children face.

And then there was the time that President Obama used his pen and phone to do something he said he couldn't legally do. In July 2012—a few months before he was up for re-election—President Obama announced that he would give legal status to 800,000 illegal aliens—along with work authorization and other benefits, like Social Security. Congress had rejected this proposal on multiple occasions—but President Obama did it anyway.

Again, the result was not a surprise: the number of unaccompanied alien children arriving at our border nearly doubled in one year. The next year, it doubled again.

That could hardly be a coincidence. The President had sent the wrong message. Criminal networks spread the lie that kids could get amnesty. As a result, tens of thousands of vulnerable children made the dangerous journey North—with terrible humanitarian consequences.

And then, in 2014, the Obama Administration doubled down and attempted to expand its unlawful amnesty to any illegal alien here since 2010.

Towards the end of the last administration, prosecutions for illegal entry and reentry both declined, and sanctuary policies were encouraged, eroding relationships with state and local law enforcement officers that had taken decades to build.

Sanctuary policies are when cities or states refuse to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. If they've got somebody in custody who is wanted for deportation—they release them back into the community. At their root, they are a rejection of all immigration law. If you won't deport somebody who came here illegally and then committed another crime—then who will you deport?

Meanwhile in Congress, efforts to end illegal immigration have been blocked at every turn. Any law enforcement policies are attacked by open borders radicals and well-paid lobbyists.

Every time something is proposed that would end illegal immigration, it gets blocked. If it works, it gets blocked. If it doesn't work—if it won't end illegal immigration—then the elites and the Washington insiders are all for it.

Eric Holder—my predecessor as Attorney General of the United States—supports sanctuary laws. Here is his legal defense of sanctuary policies: “states have the power over the health and safety of their residents and the allocation of state resources.” That's it. It's almost a non sequitur. The question is whether cities and states have the right under the Constitution to actively undermine the supreme law of the land—a question that has been settled repeatedly in the negative since 1819.

Our elites—who seem to think that they are also our betters—don't like our immigration system; they know they don't have the votes to change it—and so they have willingly embraced illegality. It is outrageous.

But the Trump administration is working to restore legality to the system and undo the damage that was done in the Obama years.

Unfortunately there has been a lot of misinformation out there on what we at the Department of Justice are doing. The reports have been so wrong that some people might even call it “fake news.”

So let me clear a few things up.

Yes, we are pursuing a “zero tolerance” prosecution policy at the border.

Under the laws of this country, illegal entry is a misdemeanor. Re-entry after having been deported is a felony.

Under the law, we are supposed to prosecute these crimes. Accordingly, I have ordered our prosecutors to pursue 100 percent of the illegal entries on the Southwest border that DHS refers to us.

If you cross the Southwest border unlawfully, then the Department of Homeland Security will arrest you and the Department of Justice will prosecute you. That is what the law calls for—and that is what we are going to do. Having children does not give you immunity from arrest and prosecution. It certainly doesn't give immunity to American citizens.

However, we are not sending children to jail with their parents. The law requires that children who cannot be with their parents be placed in custody of the Department of Health and Human Services within 72 hours.

We currently spend more than \$1 billion a year in taxpayer dollars taking care of unaccompanied illegal alien minors. Most are in HHS custody. They are provided food, education in their native language, health and dental care, and transported to their destination city—all at taxpayer expense.

It should be noted the perils to which these parents subject their children. Hundreds of aliens die every year trying to make it to the border to illegally enter this country. In many cases, children are trafficked, abused, or recruited by criminal gangs. No one should subject their child to this treacherous journey—and yet the open borders lobby encourages it every day.

But the Trump administration is ending the Obama-era incentives to bring children here illegally. Last September, the Trump administration ended DACA. We agree with President Obama: he didn't have the legal authority to give any legal status to illegal aliens without Congress. That's why this unlawful policy is over.

And now that DACA is over, the criminals can't spread the lie that kids can get amnesty.

Our policies are discouraging people from making children endure that treacherous journey. Everything the open borders lobby is doing is encouraging that and endangering these children. It's that simple.

There's only one way to stop this and that is for people to stop smuggling children. Stop crossing the border illegally with your children. Apply to enter lawfully. Wait your turn.

We have also returned the asylum process to what Congress intended it to be.

If you don't meet the requirements for asylum in this country, then you do not receive asylum here. That should not be a controversial idea.

Let me take an aside to discuss concerns raised by our church friends about separating families. Many of the criticisms raised in recent days are not fair or logical and some are contrary to law.

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Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful.

Our policies that can result in short term separation of families is not unusual or unjustified. American citizens that are jailed do not take their children to jail with them. And non-citizens who cross our borders unlawfully —between our ports of entry—with children are not an exception.

They are the ones who broke the law, they are the ones who endangered their own children on their trek.

The United States on the other hand, goes to extraordinary lengths to protect them while the parents go through a short detention period.

Please note, Church friends, that if the adults go to one of our many ports of entry to claim asylum, they are not prosecuted and the family stays intact pending the legal process.

The problem is that it became well known that adults with children were not being prosecuted for unlawful entry and the numbers surged from 15,000 in 2013 to 75,000 four years later. That policy was a declaration of open borders for family units.

Importantly, children are far more at risk attempting entry in remote areas.

I have given the idea of immigration much thought and have considered the arguments of our Church leaders. I do not believe scripture or church history or reason condemns a secular nation state for having reasonable immigration laws. If we have them, then they should be enforced. A mere desire to benefit from entry to the nation does not justify illegal entry. And, there are of course adverse consequences to illegal actions.

Once again, let me state that this nation has perhaps the most generous laws in the world.

My request to these religious leaders who have criticized the carrying out of our laws to also speak up strongly to urge anyone who would come here to apply lawfully, to wait their turn, and not violate the law.

Under the INA, asylum is available for those who leave their home country because of persecution or fear on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Asylum was never meant to solve all problems—even all serious problems—that people face every day all over the world.

You may have heard that I have “restricted” asylum eligibility or “denied” asylum eligibility to certain people. But that’s not exactly right.

I have not made new law—I have simply restated and implemented what Congress has passed: asylum is generally not for those who have suffered a private act of violence. It is for members of groups who are persecuted by the state or whom the state will not protect from persecution. Members of those groups cannot go somewhere else in their home country. Most victims of private crimes can.

Think about it. There are victims of crime all over the world—1.2 million violent crimes are committed every year in this country alone. Are all 1.2 million of these victims automatically entitled to asylum in Canada, the United Kingdom, or anywhere else they choose?

We have to make a choice: do we continue to allow the word to spread that you can come here illegally and there will be no consequences—or do we finally send the message that we enforce our laws? In the Trump administration, we enforce the law.

There is no right or entitlement—legal or moral—to come to this country. Immigration is a privilege that the American people have chosen to grant in certain cases. And let me note how generous the American people are: we allow in 1.1 million legal immigrants on a path to citizenship every year. Another 700,000 come here explicitly for jobs. Another half a million come here to attend our universities and colleges.

But we’ve got a choice here. We either have open borders or we have laws. It’s one or the other.

Some people in the media have chosen to attack us for enforcing the law. That doesn’t surprise me. But I’m not ashamed of the United States of America. I am not going to apologize for carrying out our laws. That is my duty.

President Trump ran for office promising to end the illegality and to fix our system. We are carefully and lawfully stopping the abuses in our system.

It is not a bad thing, but a good thing that President Trump is keeping his word. We intend to follow the mandate that he has received from the people. I embrace it.

President Trump made a generous offer to the Democrats in Congress. He offered to give DACA recipients true legal status if we can build a wall, close the loopholes, and switch from chain migration and the visa lottery to a merit-based system. The Democrats' refusal of this offer is baffling. He simply asked that they agree to a permanent solution to the problem. Why wouldn't you want to end the illegality?

Our goal is not radical. What is radical is the open borders policies that have been pushed on us time and again by the elites and the Washington insiders.

Our goal is that immigrants should apply, wait their turn, and that people stop making that dangerous trek across the desert rather than coming here unlawfully. If they meet the standards, then they can be admitted—and those standards should advance the national interest.

If we succeed in this—if we finally get a system we can be proud of—then we will start a virtuous cycle of lawfulness, safety, and prosperity.

The American people have been patient. We have been waiting for 30 years. They want us to seize this opportunity that we have right now. It's time that we finally deliver a lawful system of immigration that benefits them.