



Texas state senators reject Trump, sheriff's put-down of asset forfeiture reform legislation

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AUSTIN, Tex. – Sponsors of legislation to restrict Texas law enforcement agencies from seizing property of suspects before conviction have rebuffed criticism of their proposal by a county sheriff and President Trump.

State Senators Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa of McAllen and Konni Burton of Colleyville said curtailing the practice of asset forfeiture does not hamper police efforts against drug trafficking as stated by Rockwall County Sheriff Harold Eavenson during a White House visit Tuesday.

Eavenson and other officials with the National Sheriff's Association met with Trump to discuss national security issues, including how to deal with Mexican cartels shipping drugs into America.

The Rockwall County sheriff reported that an unnamed state senator in Texas was pushing legislation to prevent police from seizing cash and property from drug dealers before they are convicted in court. He said the cartels would build a monument to the senator in Mexico if the proposal became law, causing Trump to respond with disbelief.

“Who’s the state senator?” Trump asked. “Do you want to give his name? We’ll destroy his career.”

The president’s comment caused the sheriffs delegation to break out in laughter, and the Washington Post said Trump’s remark was intended as a joke, not a threat.

Eavenson refused to identify the state senator after the White House session. He said he was seriously concerned about the issue but he meant nothing personal against the lawmaker in mentioning it to the president.

“No, I do not regret doing what I did,” Eavenson told the Greenville, Texas, Herald Banner. “My comment was to exemplify how much opposed sheriffs are to this type of philosophy. It would benefit the cartels and be detrimental to law enforcement.”

State senators Hinojosa and Burton, in separate statements to CNHI’s state reporter in Austin, said they are sponsors of the type of legislation Eavenson objected to but both also said they had never spoken with him about the issue.

“I do not know and have not met with Sheriff Eavenson and, quite frankly, I don’t pay much attention to what President Trump says anymore,” said Hinojosa, a Democrat.

“However,” he added, “the asset forfeiture bills I have authored and co-authored will not interfere with our law enforcement agencies’ ability to do their jobs. Instead, these bills are an important protection for Texans’ property rights and civil liberties.”

Republican Burton said she had never heard of Sheriff Eavenson until learning about his White House meeting with the president, a meeting that caused a storm of comment on the Internet.

“I take exception to his (Eavenson’s) comments on asset forfeiture reform,” said Burton. “And I will not be discouraged nor deterred.”

Burton said police need authority to combat large criminal enterprises, but “we must be vigilant to safeguard the rights of everyday citizens from potential abuse. This is not strictly a law enforcement issue, this is a property rights issue.”

The law enforcement practice of asset forfeiture is not widely known by the public but civil rights organizations have been calling for reform because of what they describe as the opportunity for abuse.

The Washington Post reported that a December survey by the libertarian Cato Institute and the YouGov polling website found 84 percent of Americans oppose taking “a person’s money or property that is suspected to have been involved in a drug crime before the person is convicted of a crime.”

Police contend seizing money from criminal defendants and even persons not charged with crimes is sometimes necessary to protect public safety, and that asset forfeiture is a necessary tool to fight drug lords and cartels.