



Sheriffs hail Sessions for “doing exactly what law enforcement has wanted”

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Jeff Sessions’ recent efforts to dismantle several key Obama-era police reform directives earned him a very warm welcome at the National Sheriffs Association winter conference in D.C. on Monday morning.

In opening remarks introducing Sessions, the group’s executive director, Jonathan Thompson, called him perhaps “the finest attorney general the nation has ever had,” and told the crowd: “You have a friend, who is listening, who is doing exactly what law enforcement has wanted for years.”

That included, according to Thompson, the **reinstatement of the 1033 program**, which allows local law enforcement to acquire surplus military hardware, including MRAP vehicles and bayonets. The Obama administration placed curbs on the program after scenes of militarized police rolling through the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, made national headlines in 2014. It also included the reinstatement of civil asset forfeiture, and rescinding the Cole Memo, the Obama-era directive that lifted federal prosecution of marijuana offenses.

Sessions repeatedly told the attendees he and President Trump had their backs. The Trump administration has made law and order a key part of their agenda, taking a law-and-order approach to issues like immigration and the opioid epidemic.

“The office of Sheriff is a critical part of the Anglo-American heritage of law enforcement,” said Sessions to the 400 attendees -- about 10 percent more than the usual attendance. “We must never erode this historic office.”

Sessions, during his remarks, also took a few swipes at the Obama administration. In the past, he hasn’t held back from criticizing Obama-era scrutiny of systemic problems in police departments, which often led to investigations by the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division and often culminated in court-enforced agreements to implement specific reforms.

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The AG further reiterated his belief that policing problems come from bad behavior on the part of a few bad apples.

“Single incidents don’t call for federal control,” Sessions said, to great applause.

“I’ve never found that law enforcement objects to those people being prosecuted.”

Studies have repeatedly found that law enforcement were far less likely to be held accountable for their wrongdoing compared to the general public. And when allegedly bad cops are prosecuted, those charges rarely culminate in convictions. About 32 percent of charges against law enforcement end up in a conviction, compared to 68 percent of the general public, **according to research** by the CATO Institute.

“Sessions is pushing a dangerous myth,” said Chiraag Bains, a former federal prosecutor and senior official in the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division under Obama. “Investigations were never based solely on a single incident. High profile incidents could bring attention to a jurisdiction. They were often symptomatic of deeper problems in a police department.”

Bains added that, in every case, the DOJ looked for evidence of a pattern of misconduct before they opened an investigation. “DOJ opened 25 investigations over the eight years of the Obama administration,” Bains said. “There are roughly 1,000 police shootings a year. Many of them involved viral videos and sparked public protests, but did not result in a DOJ case.”

Sessions also took the opportunity to claim credit for preliminary FBI crime stats from the first six months of 2017 indicating that violent crime declined during that period, reiterating the victory lap he took in a recent USA Today op-ed. Crime data experts dispute Sessions claims, saying that he was incorrect to frame an uptick in violent crime as a “permanent trend.”

Thompson took the stage to thank Sessions after he had finished speaking. “You said you have our back?” Thompson said. “We have your back, and the president’s back.”