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Defending Donald Trump's executive orders tops Jeff Sessions' priorities

New attorney general promises to fight illegal immigration 'lawlessness'

Andrea Noble

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After Jeff Sessions was sworn in as U.S. attorney general Thursday, he gave brief remarks promising to combat crime and crack down on the “lawlessness” of illegal immigration.

But foremost on his growing list of responsibilities appears to be defending President Trump's executive orders — not least of which includes a ruling by a federal appeals court upholding an order that bars enforcement of the president's executive order on travel and refugees. Just three weeks into the presidency, dozens of lawsuits have been lodged over numerous orders.

“He is going to be swamped his first month and a lot of it is going to be the litigation over these executive orders,” said Tim Lynch, director of the Cato Institute's project on criminal justice. “That's the priority for the administration right now.”

As both an early backer of Mr. Trump and a trusted confidant, Mr. Sessions may be called upon by the president to weigh in on legal matters far beyond the scope of his predecessors.

Multiple executive orders already signed by Mr. Trump have included specific oversight roles for the attorney general.

The “Preventing Violence Against Federal, State, Tribal, and Local Law Enforcement Officers” order signed just after Mr. Sessions was sworn in at an Oval Office ceremony directs the new attorney general to review federal laws regarding the prosecution of people who harm law enforcement and to come up with legislative recommendations — including definition of new crimes or establishment of new mandatory minimum sentences — that would further protect officers.