



Senator Tells Sanctuary Cities to Follow the Law or Fund Border Wall

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Sen. Luther Strange (R-Ala.) this week continued his push for legislation to penalize sanctuary cities that disregard immigration laws or block local contractors from bidding on construction work for the Mexican border wall.

“They can either follow the law or fund the wall,” Strange said at the Heritage Foundation on Thursday, echoing what has become a slogan for the Securing the Border and Protecting Our Communities Act.

Introduced in May by Strange and Sen. David Perdue (R-Ga.), the bill would cut off transportation grant funds for municipalities that don’t cooperate with the Department of Justice in enforcing immigration laws, as well as jurisdictions obstructing the bidding process for the border wall. Excess funds would be used to finance completion of President Trump’s controversial border structure through the Secure Fence Act of 2006.

Strange called actions by sanctuary cities “an abdication of conscience that bleeds across state and local lines” and a threat to American lives. The former Alabama attorney general’s comments came the same week that Trump met at the White House with victims of crimes committed by illegal immigrants and the House voted on Kate’s Law. The president’s fiscal 2018 budget request includes \$1 million to expand the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement Office, a new entity established to assist victims of such crimes.

Strange drew attention to the namesake of Kate’s Law, Kate Steinle, who was shot to death in San Francisco in 2015 allegedly by an illegal immigrant who had been deported from the U.S. five times. Strange also recounted a 2009 incident in his home state in which 19-year-old Tad Mattle and 16-year-old Leigh Jimmerson were killed by a drunk-driving illegal immigrant, who had three previous arrests for the same infraction.

“Imagine having to come to terms with the fact that the death of a loved one was entirely preventable and fully the responsibility of a government that failed to do its job,” Strange said. “I can tell you as a former chief law enforcement official in my state, that is a very difficult conversation or explanation to give.”

Organizations and media outlets have offered conflicting reports regarding criminal statistics for both legal and illegal immigrants. Both the Sentencing Project and the Cato Institute released

reports earlier this year showing that immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate and are incarcerated less than U.S. citizens. According to Cato, for the 18- to 54-year-old age range, U.S.-born citizens are incarcerated at a rate of 1.53 percent, while undocumented immigrants were recorded at 0.85 percent and documented immigrants at 0.47 percent.

The Center for Immigration Studies reported in 2016 that 84 percent of the 820,000 illegal immigrants with criminal records committed felonies or serious misdemeanors. There are estimated to be between 11 million and 12 million undocumented people living in the country.

Strange said that the Obama administration's immigration policies resulted in a lack of focus that the Trump administration is working to rein in. He called President Obama's 2014 order to defer the deportation of illegal immigrant parents of U.S. citizen and legal resident children, which shielded about 5 million from deportation, a direct challenge to U.S. rule of law. Strange said he has been encouraged by the actions of Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Trump during his first week in office issued an executive order vowing to crack down on sanctuary jurisdictions failing to enforce immigration laws.

"For too long the rule of law has been forgotten or completely ignored, and there's a new sense of optimism in this Congress, with President Trump and my good friend Jeff Sessions as attorney general of the United States to start to address this critical issue of illegal immigration," Strange said.