

Raleigh, N.C. - This morning, Congressman David Price (D-NC) delivered the following remarks to the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association 87th annual training session, held in Raleigh:

Thank you for welcoming me to join your Annual Training Conference. I especially want to thank Sheriff Donnie Harrison and Eddie Caldwell for your kind invitation. I appreciate the relationship we have and the consultation you have provided me and my staff as we deal with issues related to local law enforcement in the Congress.

I also want to express my support and appreciation to all of you for the efforts that you and your agencies make every day to protect communities in our state. As I have often done at these events, I am here to re-affirm my pledge to be your partner in Washington to make sure you have the resources you need to accomplish your difficult missions.

Many of you know that I serve as Chairman of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee in the House. It is the job of my Subcommittee to set annual funding levels, subject to the approval of the entire Congress, for the diverse array of the programs and activities at the Department of Homeland Security. My door is always open and I welcome your input as we consider the DHS budget each year.

Since I assumed the Chairmanship in 2007, I am happy to report increased support to law enforcement above what had been proposed by the previous administration. Rather than Congress having to find money to restore funding cuts to programs like Byrne JAG, COPS, and State Homeland Security grants that the last President put on the chopping block, we are now able to work collaboratively with President Obama to provide the resources that local law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency managers have come to depend on.

For example, from 2001 to 2006 President Bush and the Republican Congress cut State and Local Law Enforcement and Crime Prevention Grants by \$1.9 billion to a low point of \$2.7 billion. Since 2006, I have worked with my colleagues in Congress to reverse that trend. Next year's Justice funding bill, which was recently passed by the House, includes \$3.4 billion for these programs in 2010. The bill would also increase COPS funding by 46% over 2009 and increase the Office of Justice Programs budget, which includes Byrne JAG grants, by 10%. Our 2010 appropriations bill for DHS provides nearly \$4 billion for state and local grants, including

\$950 million for the State Homeland Security Grant Program.

Additionally, I've been working with the House leadership to make sure Congress recognizes the pressure the economic downturn has placed on your local law enforcement budgets. As I'm sure you know, Congress provided significant funding to protect public safety jobs in the Recovery Act, including \$2 billion for Byrne JAG grants and \$1 billion for COPS hiring grants. For the first time in the history of the programs, Congress has temporarily waived the local cost share requirement for COPS grants, and has authorized use of the grants for personnel hiring and retention. I am working to enact similar provisions for firefighter staffing grants under DHS.

There is another Department of Homeland Security responsibility that has ramifications for your county law enforcement agencies: illegal immigration. As public officials, we are all engaged in a significant debate about how we should address illegal immigration. I have worked with the rest of Congress to greatly enhance border and immigration enforcement efforts over the past few years. My subcommittee has increased resources for immigration detention by more than 60% since 2006; we have grown the overall budget for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by over 57% since 2006; and during that same period we have grown the U.S. Border Patrol by 6,000 new officers. Since 2006, we have also invested \$4.3 billion on security infrastructure and technology along the Southwest border.

Despite these huge investments, we simply cannot spend our way out of the enforcement challenges we face. We first need comprehensive reform of our immigration system so that people with legitimate reason to be in the US can come out of the shadows, so that we can match our legal immigration allowances with our labor market needs, and so that our Border Patrol is freed up to focus on the real threats along our borders. In the absence of this kind of holistic reform, I have made it clear that ICE needs to prioritize its resources toward identifying and deporting criminal aliens, especially those who have shown themselves to be a danger to our communities. My subcommittee has directed the funding and provided the oversight to move ICE's enforcement efforts in that direction; one result is the so-called Secure Communities program, launched late in the Bush Administration.

I have talked with many of you about this challenge and about the need to define very carefully the role of local law enforcement in immigration enforcement. As you know far better than I, strained relationships with any group can run counter to local law enforcement's goal of keeping your communities safe for those who want to live peacefully. The concern is that immigrants -- whether they are in the United States legally or illegally -- might become less inclined to report serious crimes or to provide you information about criminal activity if they fear being reported to ICE. So I want to stress how careful we need to be in distinguishing the federal role of

immigration enforcement from the local role of community policing.

The Secure Communities program maintains such a distinction, and our subcommittee is concerned that the 287(g) program do so as well. The Government Accountability Office has expressed some concern with the way 287(g) has been implemented in some places -- uneven application of the program in different jurisdictions, the lack of ICE supervision of local results, limited complaint resolution mechanisms, and a lack of clear objectives that ensure the program operates consistently with federal immigration priorities. That is why I was pleased that DHS recently announced a retooled standardized agreement for the 287(g) program, which I believe addresses these concerns in a significant way without undermining the program's mission of empowering local officials with additional authorities to keep their communities safe.

As with ICE itself, our intention is that local law enforcement agencies that choose to partner with ICE should target their efforts to identify undocumented aliens involved in serious criminal activities. That priority is clearly articulated in the new 287(g) agreement, just as Secure Communities more explicitly distinguishes the traditional Federal role of enforcing immigration law from the local role of prosecuting criminal violations. Secure Communities, with its interoperability fingerprinting system, provides local law enforcement with identity information and criminal history that you need in order to know who is in your jails; meanwhile, it alerts ICE when a high-priority illegal alien gets remanded to local custody. The advantage to this system is that the decision to initiate deportation procedures remains squarely in the hands of federal immigration authorities, while local officers can remain focused on their jobs and not have to deal with the complicated ins- and outs- of Federal immigration law.

I hope this brief overview of my work in Congress on both Justice and Homeland Security programs helps you understand the context of some of the recent political debates surrounding these issues, and encourages you to suggest better ways we can address these challenges. I am hoping for a day when the immigration problem gets fixed through a comprehensive and pragmatic reform effort. And, with these Homeland Security programs, as well as your interaction the traditional DOJ programs, I want to continue our good working relationship to ensure Federal policies help you keep our communities safe. Thank you again for inviting me, and enjoy the rest of your conference.

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