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New Orleans: How the Crescent City became a Sanctuary City

Thank you, Mister Chairman and Madame Ranking Member, for the opportunity to address your committee on one aspect of the public safety crisis of our time: illegal immigration.

As Louisiana's chief legal officer, I committed to ensuring the rule of law is followed by everyone. Like each of you, I took an oath to defend the Constitution. This pledge shall not be broken.

Unfortunately, sanctuary policies undermine justice. They are flagrant disregards for the law we all took an oath to uphold and defend.

As I am sure you agree, government's most important function is providing safety and security to her people. Sanctuary policies not only jeopardize the ability to protect our people, but they also allow illegals to commit crimes then roam free in our communities.

It has been reported that cities with sanctuary policies have seen an increase in crime. One sanctuary city, Los Angeles, saw all crime rise in 2015: violent crime up 19.9%, homicides up 10.2%, shooting victims up 12.6%, rapes up 8.6%, robberies up 12.3%, and aggravated assault up 27.5%.

What is more: Immigration and Customs Enforcement recently revealed that 1,867 illegals released by sanctuary cities were later arrested 4,298 times with 7,491 new crimes – including rape and child sex abuse.

Sanctuary policies encourage further illegal immigration and promote an underground economy that sabotages the tax base.

Sanctuary policies also waste much-needed public resources as they force the federal government to find and arrest deportable criminals already taken into custody by local law enforcement.

This Spring, I advocated for legislation in Louisiana that would have increased public safety by incentivizing government to follow the law. A bill by Representative Valerie Hodges would give local officials the choice to cooperate with Immigration officials or to protect illegal aliens committing crimes and lose out on the ability to get state funds. A bill by Representative Jay Morris would create a private cause of action for the victims of these misguided policies.

Let me be clear: I am not trying to do the job of ICE or DHS. Between catching child predators, rooting out public corruption, and fighting federal overreach – I have more than enough to do to make Louisiana an even better place. But I am here today pushing for change because the Administration has not only decided to not enforce the law, but they have also used their power to coerce local jurisdictions in my State to institute sanctuary policies.

In my beloved New Orleans, the Justice Department entered into a consent decree with the City that mandated police officers not make inquiries into an individual's immigration status or assist ICE unless there is a warrant or court order issued.

As a former police officer and sheriff deputy, I find it unconscionable that criminals cannot be held on anything less than a warrant or a court order. After all – American citizens are detained on reasonable suspicion, arrested on probable cause, and may not see a judge for 2 to 3 days. Illegal immigrants should not be given greater rights than our own citizens have.

After hearing testimony in the Louisiana House that City of New Orleans deemed the DOJ consent decree as mandating their sanctuary policy, I wrote a letter to United States Attorney General Loretta Lynch asking for clarification. The response that this committee and I received was a lengthy, legally-worded non-answer that we have unfortunately come to expect from this Administration.

However, a recent report by DOJ's own Inspector General outlined the fact that sanctuary jurisdictions, like New Orleans, are in violation of federal law by prohibiting communication with ICE officials. Furthermore, it explicitly declared that local jurisdictions are required to be in compliance with all federal laws in order to receive federal grant dollars. All the while, the Administration has been rewarding sanctuary cities with hundreds of millions of dollars in federal grants.

Besides fiscal and legal issues, there are many health concerns. Additionally, there are homeland security issues. Foreign terrorists – such as members of ISIS – have the ability to travel to a city like New Orleans, commit a minor offense, and remain protected from being identified – due to sanctuary policies.

Reducing crime and saving lives are not partisan issues. In fact, politics never came up when I met with the family of St. John the Baptist Parish Fire Chief Spencer Chauvin. Chief Chauvin was killed last month in the Greater New Orleans Area by an illegal alien with a vast criminal background in our country.

The questions were not Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal. Rather, this grieving family simply asked one thing that this Committee, Congress, and the Administration should absolutely answer: why do we have to wait for illegals to commit violent crimes before we can deport them?

And I pose to you an even humbler one: why is being in the United States illegally not a deportable offense?

Honorable Members, we need a sound immigration policy that begins with securing the border and enforcing the immigration laws already on the books. Congress must act to help support those of us at the State level who have been fighting sanctuary policies.

Thank you very much for your time, I look forward to answering your questions.