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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

November 05, 2021

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
RANKING MEMBER
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AND WILDLIFE
SUBCOMMITTEE FOR INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ANTITRUST, COMMERCIAL,
AND ADMINISTRATIVE LAW
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COURTS,
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY,
AND THE INTERNET

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
The Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

During the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) Oversight Hearing before the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee on October 21, 2021, I called out the illegal multi-billion-dollar cannabis production operations now occurring in Southern Oregon.¹ At least four counties in this area are suffering from Mexican, Russian, and Chinese cartel activity. According to local law enforcement officials, these cartels are producing cannabis “grows” farmed by thousands of undocumented people brought across our southern border. These activities are made possible by the millions upon millions of dollars of illegal revenues generated by the cartels. Local law enforcement estimates that the amount of money obtained from these illegal grows in just one of four impacted counties exceeds \$13.5 billion annually.

As you know, your Department’s “Cole Memorandum” provides that the DOJ will not enforce federal laws prohibiting the production and sale of cannabis so long as the state that has “legalized” cannabis controls its use.² Oregon does not have the means to control the hundreds, if not thousands, of illegal cannabis “grows.” Likewise, Oregon cannot stop the influx of immigrants, many pressed into forced labor, necessary for the cartels to operate. The Federal Government’s decision to ignore illegal cannabis production (as reflected in the Cole Memorandum) combined with the Administration’s lax border policies are resulting in a humanitarian disaster. In addition to this harm to migrants, local community members are being threatened, intimidated, and harassed by these cartels.

To put it bluntly, Oregon needs the Federal Government’s help. Specifically, we need teams of up to 20 people for each affected county, to assist local law enforcement in identifying illegal grows, eradicating those grows, and then prosecuting the criminals conducting the illegal grows.

Since this is a problem that affects more than my state of Oregon, here are some questions, the answers to which we will share with other states, and which will help us understand what the DOJ, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are doing to help address this nationwide epidemic of lawlessness:

¹ [Rep. Bentz Questions Attorney General Garland on School Boards and Border / Drug Crisis - YouTube](#)

² J. Cole, Guidance Regarding Marijuana Enforcement, August 29, 2012, [Nuance Communications, Inc. \(justice.gov\)](#)

1. Does the DOJ view this crisis as one of its top priorities?
2. What is the DOJ doing to fight illegal cannabis grows conducted by trans-international cartels in the United States of America?
3. Will you direct the FBI and the DEA to provide additional resources to Oregon, and its impacted counties, to address these issues?
4. Will the DOJ address and stop what appears to be “narco-slavery” occurring in Southern Oregon?

Every day of inaction allows this crisis to spread and worsen. Your Department’s actions are essential to the safety and protection of Oregon and the United States of America.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cliff Bentz", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Cliff Bentz
Member of Congress