

## **Attorney General Sessions Delivers Remarks at the DEA Graduation Ceremony**

Friday, January 26, 2018, Quantico, VA

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*Remarks as prepared for delivery.*

Thank you, Acting Administrator Patterson for that kind introduction, for your leadership, and for three decades of service to the DEA.

I also want to thank Principal Deputy Administrator Grubbs for being here, for his 35 years of service to the DEA and nearly 40 years of service in law enforcement.

Thank you to FBI Assistant Director David Resch for being an outstanding partner and supporting the efforts of this academy.

And thank you to Special Agent in Charge Greg Cherundolo for your hospitality today and for your efforts to train these fabulous graduates.

Before I say anything else, congratulations to the stars of the show—our graduates and their families. Most of you have law enforcement experience already—and I want to thank you for your service.

But today is a special day. In just a few minutes, you will become DEA Special Agents. It is a great job, an important mission, and a fulfilling career.

In particular, I want to congratulate our Outstanding Student, Taylor Williams, of the Phoenix Division.

And I want to acknowledge two graduates from my home state of Alabama: Jeremy Epp of Auburn University and the Friendswood Police Department, and Hubert Walters of Faulkner University and the Montgomery Police Department. Congratulations also to Hubert on the two awards you have earned here. Great job.

I am here today on behalf of President Trump to say thank you to all of our law enforcement officers—especially our 42 graduates—and to their families. He is your strongest supporter.

Today you join the elite group of 5,000 DEA Special Agents. You will play an indispensable role in arresting drug traffickers at the highest levels and stopping the dangerous narcotics trends in America.

I was just briefed on a case that occurred in a town I know well, called Selma. DEA was asked to help with an issue related to gang violence. And DEA did what they do best: they sent dedicated men and women to work with their local counterparts and prosecutors.

They all worked tirelessly using every investigative tool available—including search warrants, pole cameras, and controlled purchases—which ultimately led to telephone intercepts. In the end, they were able to prevent an alleged planned murder and take seven alleged gang members off of our streets. That will keep people safer. The community in every aspect is better for you work.

But that's what DEA Special Agents do. And that's what you will do now.

No two days will be exactly alike. As a Special Agent, you will work long hours—and unpredictable hours. You don't set your schedule—the criminals do.

You signed a Mobility Agreement, so you will also get to see the globe—fight transnational criminal organizations-and arrest criminals.

You will see the dark side of human nature, but you will also see the people in your communities kept safe—and that will give you strength.

You will be able to face the dangers in front of you because of the people you love standing behind you and people you trust standing beside you.

I remember, as a U.S. Attorney, working closely with DEA Special Agents. I was impressed by their camaraderie and their professionalism. Many become good friends. After nearly 40 years of working and interacting with them, I'm even more impressed today.

In recent years, there was an erosion of support for anti-drug law enforcement—in Congress, in state legislatures, and even among some of the general public. One law enforcement professional told me that he felt disappointed that government officials didn't seem to understand the importance of his work. Resources were redirected. What has been the result? We saw drug purity and availability go up and drug prices go down. We saw addiction and death spread like never before.

So I wanted to be here today to state loudly and clearly: this Department of Justice supports you. We believe in you and the importance- the morality- of your mission.

The DEA's work of enforcing our drug laws has never been more important than it is right now. That is because today we are facing the deadliest drug crisis in American history. Approximately 64,000

Americans lost their lives to drug overdoses in 2016, and preliminary data show another, but smaller, increase for 2017.

Amazingly, for Americans under the age of 50, drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death.

For 2018, our goal must be to see these unacceptable overdose deaths fall and to continue to fall in the years to come. This carnage must end. The nation has never seen such deaths before.

No community in America has been immune to this crisis. I personally know people whose families have been bankrupted and torn apart by drug addiction. These days it is a safe assumption that most of you do, too.

The situation is daunting, but we can and will make a positive difference. Ours is not a hopeless mission.

When we enforce our drug laws, we prevent addiction and violence from spreading. The work that you will now do helps keep drugs out of our country, reduce their availability, drive up their price, and reduce their purity and addictiveness. That really does save lives.

And that's why this Department has been so aggressively pursuing those who would profit off of addiction.

In August I announced new resources to find and prosecute the fraudsters who help flood our streets with prescription opioids. The first new resource is a data analytics program called the Opioid Fraud and Abuse Detection Unit. This data analytics team helps us find the tell-tale signs of opioid-related health care fraud by identifying statistical outliers— like who is prescribing the most drugs, who is dispensing the most drugs, and whose patients are dying. This is an overdue policy change.

After all, the fraudsters lie—but the numbers don't. And now the fraudsters can't hide.

I have also assigned experienced prosecutors in opioid hot spots to focus solely on investigating and prosecuting opioid-related health care fraud in places where they are especially needed.

These prosecutors, working with the DEA, the FBI, the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as our state and local partners, will help us target and prosecute doctors, pharmacies, and medical providers who are exploiting the epidemic to line their pockets. And they've already begun issuing indictments.

In September the Department issued our first-ever indictments of Chinese nationals for schemes to distribute massive quantities of fentanyl in the United States.

And since most of the fentanyl in this country originated in China, I doubt they'll be the last.

Fortunately, China has begun to follow DEA's lead on this issue. In November, DEA announced plans to schedule all forms of fentanyl—giving us another legal tool to put drug traffickers behind bars. I applaud that decision.

In December, China announced that it would schedule two more fentanyl precursors.

This is something that Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein and I have advocated for repeatedly in meetings with Chinese officials. I know that DEA officials support it, too. It's a good next step, and I am hopeful that China will eventually take DEA's position and schedule all fentanyl analogues.

In November, I ordered each of our U.S. Attorney offices to designate an opioid coordinator to strengthen and customize our anti-drug strategy in each district.

These coordinators will work with you and help us decide which cases warrant federal resources or which cases are best prosecuted at the state or local levels. I believe that will make our work- your work- more efficient and more effective.

We need to use every lawful tool we have (and that includes lawfully and properly forfeiting the ill-gotten gains of drug dealers) to weaken this dangerous network.

If we do, we will stop and reverse this surging problem. And the graduates here today make me even more confident in that.

I meet with DEA Special Agents often, but I don't always get to see your families. And so I want to take a moment right now to thank all of the DEA families who are here. It's tough being in a law enforcement family. You're making a sacrifice, too. Thank you for sharing these remarkable people with us.

I want you to know that this Department and this country recognizes you and appreciates you, too.

Let me conclude by making this clear: we are in this together. We support you and embrace your mission, one that represents a top priority of the Department of Justice. Go at your work honorably and with enthusiasm and determination. Be creative. Come up with better ideas. We can defeat this evil presence that is killing our people, destroying our families, and weakening our nation.

All of you can be sure of this: you have our thanks and this Department of Justice will always have your back. Thank you.