

**Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on "Oversight of the Department of Justice"
October 18, 2017**

Attorney General Sessions, welcome. Thank you for being here for this oversight hearing.

Oversight is just one of the critical functions and constitutional responsibilities for the legislative branch. It's an opportunity for Congress to investigate and question the policies and actions of the executive branch. It's an opportunity for the executive branch to take responsibility for them. And it's an opportunity for Congress to defend its constitutional powers and to check any abuses by an over-reaching executive branch.

Some have complained that you weren't up here earlier. I thought you should have your team in place before appearing before us. Certainly, Attorney General Holder and Attorney General Lynch did have their respective teams well in place by the time they appeared here. The other side has been blocking executive nominations for the past ten months, significantly delaying DOJ's ability to get management in place and things in order.

The Department of Justice is an incredibly important part of our executive branch. DOJ is charged with enforcing the law and ensuring the public safety against foreign and domestic threats. Our citizens look to the Department of Justice to provide federal leadership in preventing and controlling crime. We rely on the Department to seek just punishment for those guilty of unlawful behavior and to ensure the fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans.

DOJ currently faces many difficult issues. First, our country is challenged with the ever-growing threat of foreign and home-grown terrorism. We've seen terrorist incidents evolving around the world, especially impacting our friends in Europe.

In the U.K. alone, there have been at least a half dozen major terrorist incidents in the past 9 months, including a subway bombing in London, injuring 30 people; a van plowing down pedestrians on London Bridge, injuring 48 and killing 8 people; the Manchester concert bombing in which 22 people were killed; and the attack on British Parliament in London, killing 4, including Kurt Cochran of Utah.

Here at home, we had the San Bernadino shooting, where terrorists killed 14 and injured 22; the Orlando nightclub shooting, where 49 were killed and 53 wounded; a terrorist stabbed 10 people at a mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota; several bombs planted in New Jersey and New York, and blew up in Manhattan, injured 31; a terrorist injured 13 after driving into and trying to stab students and teachers at Ohio State University.

These attacks show the threats are real and we must protect our country by lawful means. Congress has tried to do so by providing lawful authorities such as Section 702 of the FISA Amendment Act.

Congress passed the legislation and President Bush signed it into law in 2008. After more debate and President Obama's support, Congress reauthorized the law in 2012 unchanged. The law is again up for reauthorization.

Section 702 is scheduled to expire at the end of the year. It's up to Congress to reauthorize this important national security tool, while preserving privacy and civil liberties and increasing transparency for the American public. I am interested in hearing your thoughts on this important legislation.

In September, the FBI released its annual crime data. For the second year in a row, violent crime increased across the United States. Homicides increased by 8.6%. Cities like Baltimore, Chicago, and Kansas City, Missouri have seen massive increases in their homicide rates. Baltimore is on pace to top the number of homicides in New York City, with a population of almost 8 million less people. Staggering.

And this country continues to be mired in a national epidemic of overdose deaths and abuse of opioid drugs. Over 47,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2014, which was an all-time high. Incredibly, that number rose to 50,000 in 2015; and then in 2016 it jumped even higher to 64,000 people.

This was all during the Obama administration, but I want to know what the Department of Justice is doing to reduce violent crime to help ensure that the citizens around this country feel safe in their communities.

I also want to find out what DOJ is doing to combat the opioid crisis. As you know, I care deeply about this issue. The abuse of prescription pain killers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl are destroying lives and communities across Iowa. I know that other parts of the country have been hit even harder.

I co-sponsored the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or "CARA," which I helped pass through this Committee and was signed into law in 2016. CARA addresses the opioid crisis in a comprehensive way, by authorizing almost \$900 million over five years for prevention, education, treatment, recovery, and law enforcement efforts.

Just this past weekend reports suggested that Congress gave a pass to big drug companies making prescription opioids by enacting the "Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act" in 2016. DOJ and DEA signed off on this bill. Now former DEA employees are railing against the law and pointing fingers at lawmakers. If DEA had problems with this bill, they should have warned Congress. They didn't. The Obama Administration actually provided

language for the bill and signed it into law. I'm planning to have an oversight hearing that will include your department to see what if anything needs changing.

On October 1, this country suffered through the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. Stephen Paddock killed 58 people in Las Vegas. He sprayed bullets from a hotel room on a crowd gathered for a country music festival in Las Vegas. During last week's recess, ATF briefed Judiciary staff on "bump stocks." We'll be looking more at that issue.

In September, the President announced a wind-down of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA, with a six-month delay for current recipients.

My office received preliminary data showing 2,021 individuals who had their DACA status terminated for criminal and gang related activity. We want to know who these criminals are, what kinds of crimes they're committing and what gangs they're with.

Separately, you announced earlier this year DOJ's recommitment to criminal immigration enforcement. 50 more immigration judges were supposed to be added to the bench this year, and 75 more in 2018. We need to know what steps DOJ has taken and what still needs to be done to reduce immigration court backlogs.

There is another issue that I want to address that came up in the news just yesterday. In June 2015 and again last week, I wrote to the Justice Department about Russia's acquisition of Uranium One which was approved during the Obama administration. That transaction resulted in the Russians owning 20 percent of America's uranium mining capacity.

It turns out that during the transaction, the Justice Department had an ongoing criminal investigation for bribery, extortion, and money laundering into officials for the Russian company making that purchase. Russians involved in the conspiracy were reportedly coordinating with high level officials, close to Vladimir Putin.

While all of this was going on, the Clinton Foundation reportedly received millions of dollars from interested parties in the transaction. Then-Secretary Clinton's State Department was one of the agencies that gave a thumbs up to the take-over. Somehow, despite all this, the Obama administration approved this transaction.

In my letter, I asked the agencies involved in approving the transaction if they were aware of the criminal probe and the intelligence operation examining Russian activity. This committee has an obligation to get to the bottom of this issue.

The Committee is also waiting for responses to 10 oversight letters sent to the DOJ on matters from which the Attorney General is not recused. There are more letters that haven't been answered. The letters date back to January 2016. I expect these letters will be answered.

I also want to ask you about the firing of former FBI Director James Comey. It was an important moment for the Department of Justice and for this country. The American people have a right to know why he was fired, especially in the midst of so many high-profile issues, including the investigation into Russian interference with the 2016 election.

Thank you Attorney General Sessions for your participation in this important hearing, and for your continued service to the country.