

Operation Gatekeeper: Next Steps  
Remarks for the Attorney General  
October 14, 1995

I am so pleased to return to San Diego and to learn about the progress that we have made over the past year with Operation Gatekeeper. This is my seventh visit to this part of the U.S.- Mexican border in the two-and-a-half years that I have been Attorney General. I have seen this border transformed over that time, and I am extremely proud of the accomplishments that you -- our Justice Department team -- have achieved.

President Clinton, Commissioner Meissner and I have asked a great deal of our federal law enforcement agencies in San Diego. We have asked you to tackle a decades-old problem of monumental proportions quickly. We have

asked you to bring a border that was out of control under control.

The problems along the San Diego border have been long in the making, and we all know that we cannot solve these problems overnight. But with the hard work and commitment of everyone here today, and the many dedicated Border Patrol agents, inspectors, and other law enforcement personnel along the San Diego border, we are marching together West to East toward a secure border.

As Johnny Williams, Gus de la Vina, and Mark Reed have just told us, the border is harder to cross now than at any time in history, and for the first time ever, we are making the ports of entry off limits to phony document users and lane runners. As we also learned from Alan

Bersin, we are making criminal aliens and smugglers pay for their misdeeds. We now have a strict prosecution program in place to indict, convict, and incarcerate criminal aliens and smugglers. Your innovation, commitment, and cooperation have led to unprecedented change. What a significant difference you have made in one year's time.

We all know that major challenges still lie ahead. Last year, I came here to launch Operation Gatekeeper and to provide you with the building blocks for its first year. Today, I am here to announce new steps to build and expand on your foundation of enforcement.

First, I have appointed United States Attorney Alan Bersin as my Special Representative for the Southwest Border. In that capacity, he will harness resources from

throughout the Department of Justice, and he will bring his tremendous record of accomplishments as a prosecutor to solve the problems of illegal immigration, crime, and drug trafficking that extend across the entire Southwest border.

Alan Bersin will initially focus on the border in his district here in California, but he will work with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, other United States Attorneys, and other agencies to extend the strategies that are working so successfully here to other districts farther east.

Second, we are going to impose severe consequences on people we catch trying to cross our border illegally.

Our message to illegal aliens is clear: If we catch you at a port of entry with a phony document, or if you are a criminal and we catch you trying to enter illegally, or if you repeatedly try to sneak across the border, we will detain

you and send you home with an exclusion or deportation order. Our Port Court pilot has proven effective even while operating out of temporary space with borrowed immigration judges. Building on the success of that pilot, we are constructing a permanent Port Court at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry.

We have already started to register the fingerprint and photograph of everyone excluded or deported at the Port Court. We will use this data to identify and prosecute individuals who return to the United States after being excluded or deported.

We will ensure that we have adequate detention space to support our expanded prosecution program. We are working with the Department of Defense to obtain prison

space in their facilities to house criminal aliens awaiting federal prosecution. We will use jail space in counties around San Diego to meet our detention needs arising from the Port Court. I have also instructed my staff to work with the Sheriff and other officials from San Diego County to address our long term detention needs. We have formed a federal-county working group that has already begun to develop plans for construction of a joint federal-county jail -- an unprecedented proposal. In short, we will commit to providing the resources needed to prosecute and punish those who repeatedly defy our laws.

Finally, we will immediately increase the strength on the line by the equivalent of 143 agents here in San Diego by detailing Border Patrol agents from around the country and paying agents already assigned to San Diego for

working overtime. These agents will help address increased pressures in the eastern areas and strengthen control across the entire San Diego sector. This enhanced agent strength will serve as an interim measure -- until January 1996 -- while 143 recruits who have already been hired complete their training at the Border Patrol Academy.

When President Clinton announced his immigration policy two years ago, his charge to us was clear. We must control illegal immigration into the United States and we should use every resource we can use in a responsible and effective way to achieve this important goal. We will not let up in our commitment. Beginning here in San Diego, we are creating a seamless web of enforcement -- from the border to the workplace. We must restore the integrity of

our borders to preserve our proud history of legal immigration.

I will return to Washington tomorrow and I will bring your report on Operation Gatekeeper to President Clinton. On behalf of the President, I would like to thank you for the work you have done and for your commitment to continue to protect our nation's boundaries and to protect the American people.

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