



U.S. Department of Justice

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NEWS ADVISORY

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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY KENNETH J. GONZALES ANNOUNCES PRIORITIES FOR HIS ADMINISTRATION

On May 3, 2010, Kenneth Gonzales was sworn in as United States Attorney for the District of New Mexico by Chief Judge Martha Vazquez of the United States District Court. Mr. Gonzales, a federal prosecutor who joined the U.S. Attorney's Office in 1999, will supervise the prosecution of all federal crimes and civil litigation in which the federal government has an interest in the District, which encompasses all of New Mexico. He will oversee the work of more than 140 attorneys and staff in offices in Albuquerque and Las Cruces. Under his leadership, the United States Attorney's Office will adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards and will carry out its mission evenhandedly without regard to politics or personal interest. Mr. Gonzales' priorities during his administration include:

■ **Fight Terrorism and Improve National Security**

The United States Attorney's Office will utilize every mechanism available within the federal criminal justice system to combat terrorism and any other threat to our national security, including threats to our national science assets housed at Los Alamos National Laboratory, Sandia National Laboratory and at New Mexico's military installations. Mr. Gonzales will chair the Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council in the District – a network of local, state, tribal, and federal officials working together to detect, deter and prevent terrorism and promote national security – and will expand collaboration with state and local governments, academic and research institutions, and community organizations to pro-actively identify and prevent threats to our national security.

- **Ensure Border Integrity and Security**

New Mexico's shared border with the Republic of Mexico makes gaining and maintaining operational control of the border a high priority for the U.S. Attorney's Office. A secure border is not only a regional priority, but a national one, and is a necessary component of any strategy to protect our national security. Although significant strides toward gaining operational control of the border have been made through a concerted effort between the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice, we cannot afford to become complacent. The U.S. Attorney's Office is committed to the strong, effective and humane enforcement of the immigration laws. Under Mr. Gonzales' stewardship, the U.S. Attorney's Office will continue to work with its federal law enforcement partners to stem the northbound flow of illegal drugs and the southbound flow of weapons and currency, and to assist the Republic of Mexico in its fight against the violent drug cartels by bringing to justice those who profit the most from the drug trade through increased federal prosecution and forfeiture of the profits they derive from their criminal activity.

- **Combat Violent Crime in Indian Country**

Mr. Gonzales is committed to a long-term sustained effort to reduce violence and improve public safety on lands occupied by our 22 Indian tribes, including 19 Pueblos, two Apache Reservations and the Navajo Nation. Addressing violence against women and children and curbing the rising problem of drug trafficking on Indian lands will continue to be a priority of the U.S. Attorney's Office. Mr. Gonzales will step up enforcement of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), laws enacted to penalize those who loot or vandalize archeological resources on public lands, and those who illegally traffic in Native American cultural items, including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony, and return those items to lineal descendants. Mr. Gonzales will work to improve communication and coordination between federal, state and tribal law enforcement agencies to build and maintain government-to-government relationships with tribal leaders geared toward promoting justice in Indian Country.

- **Protect Civil and Constitutional Rights**

Mr. Gonzales is committed to upholding the civil and constitutional rights of all individuals, including the most vulnerable members of our society, by enforcing federal statute that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex,

disability, religion, familial status and national origin, and by prosecuting hate crimes and criminal interference with those obtaining reproductive health services.

■ **Prevent and Prosecute Fraud**

The U.S. Attorney's Office is committed to aggressively investigating and prosecuting financial crimes, with a heightened focus on mortgage fraud and health care fraud. Millions of Americans have been devastated by the housing crisis and many have been victimized by mortgage fraud schemes. The Office's efforts to combat mortgage fraud are part of the national initiative announced by President Obama in November 2009 (Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force) to tackle the challenges and consequences of mortgage fraud. Working in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr. Gonzales will use every tool at his disposal to prevent, prosecute and punish mortgage fraud crimes. Mr. Gonzales also will focus on prosecuting health care fraud, which costs taxpayers billions of dollars each year and on recovering taxpayer money lost to health care fraud. In 2009, the number of federal health care fraud defendants charged nationwide reached an all-time high of 800 indictments, and the U.S. Attorney's Office will build on that success by holding accountable those in New Mexico who perpetrate health care fraud. Mr. Gonzales recognizes that the tools available to us to combat all types of financial fraud are not limited to criminal prosecutions, and he will use his Office's Civil Enforcement Program, which draws upon a panoply of statutory and common-law civil claims and remedies, including the Federal False Claims Act, which provides treble damages for the government's losses and penalties for each false claim, to fully compensate the government for its losses and deter future misconduct.

■ **Investigate and Prosecute Public Corruption**

Public corruption is the breach of the public's trust by government officials – whether at the federal, state or local level, whether elected, appointed, or under contract – who use their public office for personal gain. Corrupt officials may be abetted in their criminal conduct by unscrupulous individuals who seek access to government resources, business opportunities or favorable regulatory treatment. Corrupt public officials undermine the legitimacy of government, the security of the nation's borders, and the infrastructure of this country. Public corruption is costly, wasting billions of tax dollars every year. Mr. Gonzales will work with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Inspectors General of other federal agencies to coordinate the investigation and prosecution of corrupt public officials in New Mexico. He will build upon the recent successes of the U.S. Attorney's Office in prosecuting public corruption cases, and will zealously pursue new investigations, without fear or favor, following them wherever the facts lead.

■ **Protect Our Children**

The protection of our most vulnerable victims, our children, is one of the United States Attorney's Office highest priorities. We will work to ensure that our children are safe from violence and abuse by aggressively enforcing federal laws designed to protect children from internet predators and by vigorously prosecuting individuals who possess, distribute or produce child pornography. Through Project Safe Childhood, a Department of Justice program designed to combat on-line child exploitation and abuse, we will work with local, state, and federal law enforcement and community organizations to raise public awareness and prevent the on-line exploitation of our children.

■ **Represent and Defend the United States' Interests**

The Office's Civil Division represents the United States' interests in a broad range of litigation that reflects the diversity of governmental activities, including all manner of accident and liability claims benefit programs; energy and environmental policies; commercial issues such as contract disputes, banking insurance, patents fraud, and debt collection; and enforcement of immigration laws. Under Mr. Gonzales, the Office's Civil Division will continue fairly and honorably to represent the United States in any civil matter within its scope of responsibility while preserving the intent of Congress, and advancing the credibility and interests of the government before the courts.

■ **Improve Community Relations, Outreach and Collaboration between Federal, State, Tribal and Local Law Enforcement**

Mr. Gonzales will collaborate with federal, state, tribal and local law enforcement authorities to inform and educate the public with the goal of building trust and preventing crime. Through community-based efforts, Mr. Gonzales will work to improve the quality of life for the people of New Mexico through initiatives like Project Safe Neighborhoods and the Weed and Seed Program, which promote community-based strategies designed to combat drug trafficking and violence. As a parent, Mr. Gonzales intimately appreciates the tough choices children are confronted with today at younger and younger ages. Mr Gonzales recognizes that the U.S. Attorney's Office, law enforcement and the public have a shared responsibility to reach out to our youth and help them make positive and safe choices. He intends to expand community outreach in our schools to accomplish these goals and make New Mexico a safer place for our children.