

## U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

I recently read an article in a local alternative weekly magazine that criticized the manner in which this office was handling a relatively small case. Prosecutors have thick skins, and I learned long ago that being a prosecutor meant making decisions that are not necessarily popular. I won't dwell on the discussion of the case itself. While defense attorneys often have freer rein to discuss their cases with the media, it is generally not appropriate for prosecutors to do so while a case is ongoing, if that might jeopardize the defendant's right to a fair trial. What I found most disturbing about the article, however, were the quotations it included – attributed to attorneys who do not practice in this district and who know very little about what this office does – about prosecutors in general trying to hype their cases in order to advance their careers, and about “politicized” prosecutions. It is common for some defense counsel to try to de-legitimize the actions of their adversaries by questioning their personal motives. But this tactic unfortunately perpetuates an inaccurate stereotype, seen all too often in the media, of over-zealous, headline-grabbing prosecutors who put their own interests before the interests of justice. This caricature is at odds with my experience during the last two decades in the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Department of Justice is the world's largest law firm, with over 10,000 attorneys nationwide. In recent years, the Department has devoted more resources to training, guidance and oversight relating to ethics and professionalism than ever before. As in any organization that size, there are some who do not perform to expectations. Mistakes and errors in judgment occur in the course of litigation involving some of the tens of thousands of cases we handle each year. But in the vast majority of cases we do outstanding work, and most federal prosecutors I have met are thoughtful attorneys, who are trying above all to do the right thing for the right reasons.

United States Attorneys are not elected, and the prosecutors in our offices are career civil service employees. Hying their cases would not advance their careers. I require press releases on many of our cases because deterrence is an important aspect of federal enforcement, and because the public whom we serve is entitled to know what we are doing. Most prosecutors in this office, however, view media attention as a distraction to be avoided. Moreover, in this office and in other U.S. Attorneys' Offices around the country, allowing political or partisan considerations to influence the handling of a case is a fast way to end your career, not to advance it.

The U.S. Department of Justice is very selective in whom we hire, and we demand considerable sacrifice. Most of the attorneys in this office could make far more money working somewhere else. They do this work because they believe in the mission, and because it is incredibly rewarding to work hard serving the public on meaningful cases. It is inspiring to spend each day around people with that sort of idealism and dedication.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

*Benjamin B. Wagner*