

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

PRESS BRIEFING

- - -

FISCAL YEAR 1997 BUDGET

Tuesday, March 19, 1996
11:00 a.m.

Janet Reno, Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice

Steven R. Colgate
Assistant Attorney General for Administration

Michael J. Roper
Deputy Assistant Attorney General
for Administration/Controller

Room J 1050
701 18th Street, NW
Washington, DC
ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning.
This budget is about building on progress,

P R O C E E D I N G S

and fighting drugs, and fighting crime, and fighting terrorism, and in fighting illegal immigration.

We are asking Congress today for \$18.6 billion in Fiscal Year 1997, a 13.7 percent increase over last year's budget. This increase underscores President Clinton's commitment to fighting crime, even as he submits a plan to balance the budget in seven years.

In the three years since I came to Washington, I believe that we have made real progress in bringing the federal government to the status of full partner in fighting crime and upholding the rule of law with local law enforcement.

The 1994 Crime Bill will put 100,000 police on the streets, if Congress will keep its pledge. The Antiviolent Crime Initiative has brought federal and local law enforcement closer than ever, and it is making a difference.

Our border control efforts are finally turning the southwest border around, and we are enforcing work site sanctions and criminal alien removals at record levels. In three years we have made so much progress; our challenge now is to build on that progress.

Building on this strong foundation, we must continue to strengthen our commitment to fighting drug trafficking, drug abuse, and the cycle of crime and drugs. This budget provides \$700 million in new drug enforcement resources, and 11 percent increase overall, which includes an additional 18 percent boost in DEA enforcement resources.

That means 60 new DEA agents on the street, a southwest drug initiative, that will deploy another 54 new DEA agents, 70 new FBI agents, and 91 new assistant U.S. attorneys, to investigate and prosecute major Mexican drug trafficking organizations operating along the southwest border, and to help control public corruption.

A new DEA office in South Africa, to begin a new effort to fight international heroin trafficking in a region that is becoming a major center for smuggling heroin into the United States.

And finally, additional computers, communication equipment, aircraft, vehicles and laboratories.

But we must do more, and this budget will help provide \$100 million to localities to build drug courts which have been so successful in helping nonviolent offenders break the cycle of drugs. Congress needs to keep the promise it made in 1994, and fund these drug courts.

In part because of the new cops on the beat, and our antiviolent crime initiative, violent crime fell in 1994, and again in the first half of 1995. This budget can help us sustain this progress, and come to grips with the growing problem of youth crime in America.

Step one is an unambiguous commitment to keep the President's promise, and to fund 100,000 community police officers for the streets of this nation.

Our budget would provide \$1.98 billion to help us hire another 19,000 police officers, bringing us to nearly 68,000, if Congress keeps the promise of the 1994 Crime Act.

Step two is a crackdown on the consequences and causes of youth and gang violence, with more than \$30 million to pay for community based solutions, the FBI's Safe Streets Task Forces, and an expansion of the Office of Justice Program's comprehensive gang program.

Step three is to keep our promise to fight violence against women, with \$189 million for projects like special units made up of local prosecutors and police, to deal with domestic violence and sexual assault, and emergency rooms with special capacity to focus on such incidents.

At home and abroad, we face the terrorist threat. This budget pledges new resources to help prevent terrorist acts, and to make terrorists pay for what they do. The budget funds 108 new FBI agents to maintain our aggressive counterterrorism initiatives at home and abroad.

We have also requested \$9.7 million for the counterterrorism fund established in response to the Oklahoma City bombing. The fund is used to reimburse other agencies for the cost of countering, investigating and prosecuting domestic and/or international terrorism, and to finance reward payments.

The money can also be used to restore offices destroyed or damaged in the Oklahoma City bombing, or other domestic or international acts of

terrorism.

Finally, we have made historic progress in securing our borders, and upholding our immigration laws, after years of neglect. We are seeing real results, but again, we must build on the progress we have made.

This budget provides a 16 percent increase for INS, and continues our commitment to a firm and equitable immigration policy that enforces the rule of law at our borders and in the American work place. That's a more than 100 percent increase since 1993, when we began to implement President Clinton's comprehensive immigration strategy.

On the border we will be able to hire 700 more border patrol agents, 150 new immigration inspectors, and purchase more equipment such as border sensors and infrared scopes, to continue to build on successful programs like Operation Hold-the-Line, Operation Safeguard, and Operation Gatekeeper.

As I mentioned a minute ago, our southwest border drug initiative will deploy new DEA agents, new FBI agents, and new assistant U.S. attorneys, to investigate and prosecute major drug trafficking organizations operation along the border.

With nearly \$6 million in new resources, we will be able to strengthen our efforts to crack down on border corruption, and with this budget we will step up enforcement and sanctions against employers who hire illegal aliens, expand our efforts to remove criminal aliens, and help reimburse states for the cost of incarcerating illegal aliens.

Our budget will do much more. We are asking for funding to continue to create a national system to stop illegal gun sales, to improve forensic testing, to pay for more prison cells, to fight health care fraud, to stop scams against seniors, and to continue reinventing our government, by speeding up the prisoner booking process, and automating our freedom of information system.

But the core of this budget will help us focus on our core priorities--drugs, violent crime, terrorism, and illegal immigration. We have made real progress fighting these problems in these three years, and now, with the help of Congress, we can continue that effort.

I would be glad to take a few questions, and Steve Colgate and Mike Roper, and a number of the Justice Department budget officials are here, also, to provide additional information.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you're not having much luck with the Republican majority in Congress now with your current budget; what makes you think you're going to have better luck with the '97 budget?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Anybody who gets into government should always be hopeful.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: What battles have you used within the administration? What didn't you get that you wanted, that you asked for?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think this year we had an opportunity to work with everybody concerned, and to come up with a general consensus, where we haven't--I don't think we've won or lost. I think we've developed a very solid budget.

QUESTION: Well, what would you liked to have gotten that you didn't get?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think, considering the budget realities and the needs of the department, we've done very well.

QUESTION: So you're not going to answer my question?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, you once said that I was best at not answering your questions.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: Since we don't have a Fiscal-96 budget yet, what are all the Fiscal-96 figures based on? Are they from the President's budget a year ago?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The conference action.

Thank you very much.

MR. STERN: Mike and Steve are available to answer any other questions you may have.

MR. COLGATE: I just want to amend that it's conference action except for the community policing.

QUESTION: Given the fact that you don't have a completed or approved '96 budget, how difficult has it been to come up with your '97 figures?

MR. ROPER: I don't think it really

affected it, as long as we made a decision at a certain point that we were going to use essentially the conference level, plus some changes for cops, as our base line, it was not a difficult exercise.

QUESTION: How many cops have been funded for this budget?

MR. ROPER: I think there are roughly 33,000 already funded. There would be another, roughly--I'm trying to go through the backwards math--19 from 68 is roughly 47,000 that would be funded through '96, were the President's budget to be enacted.

QUESTION: The department's been criticized for not sending money quickly enough to the states to reimburse them for the cost of incarcerating illegal immigrants.

It was mentioned that there was an increase in funding requested for that. Do you know how much that is, offhand?

MR. COLGATE: We're provided \$530 million for that program. I believe it's a \$30 million increase--SCAT--

MR. ROPER: It's 500. We're remaining at \$500 million in '97. It's 330 that's directly authorized for SCAT, but another 170 that'll be coming out of the present grant program.

QUESTION: So it's the same?

MR. ROPER: Correct.

QUESTION: Did any of the divisions take a cut?

MR. COLGATE: Any of the divisions? Are you talking about the legal divisions, or any organizations?

QUESTION: I'm talking about divisions or organizations within the Justice Department.

MR. COLGATE: Yes, the Parole Commission has a small cut.

QUESTION: And that's about it?

QUESTION: Did you request the full authorized amounts in the crime law for all the programs, not just cops?

MR. ROPER: For the Justice part, I don't know if we've got every last dollar, but I think it's fairly close to what is authorized for the Justice area.

QUESTION: For the prevention programs as well?

MR. ROPER: Prevention, I think, at least

my memory from what I saw in the budget appendix, at least the draft, I think the prevention programs are funded at a higher level overall, not only in Justice, than they were in '96.

QUESTION: Can you characterize how the information technology budgets did across the different organizations, or how much they increased?

MR. COLGATE: Very well. If you heard the Attorney General talk about infrastructure, one of our major infrastructure initiatives is the information technology budgets.

QUESTION: Any one in particular?

MR. COLGATE: You know, I'll just give you a few examples: In the executive office for immigration review, this budget proposes replacing its antiquated Wang System with a new system. This budget provides funding for drug fire in Merlin, pest systems in DEA.

It continues a significant investment in the Immigration Service for automated data processing.

I mean, in every one of our major accounts, we have significant infrastructure in which ADP's right there at the top.

QUESTION: Do you have an overall figure for that?

MR. COLGATE: We can provide that afterwards, what our estimates are on what we jokingly refer to as "Exhibits 43 A's and B's," which I'm sure that's what you're interested in, but, yes, we can give you a sense of it afterwards.

QUESTION: Do the additional provisions for new FBI agents, for example, and other personnel, is that over and above what had already been planned for the hundreds of agents that are going through now, being hired now and put on the street.

MR. COLGATE: That's correct, this is over and above the '96 levels. There were significant increases in '95, continued in '96, and so this is an additional enhancement over the '96 levels.

QUESTION: The same question with regard to the southwest border and immigration initiatives, are all these dollar amounts new or over and above?

MR. COLGATE: New, over and above. These are enhancements.

MR. ROPER: Could I just go back to one of

yours--I think I said 47--it should be 49,000 for the police--49 plus 19 should get to the 68 that's planned for 1997.

MR. STERN: Further questions? Hearing none, we're adjourned.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:16 a.m., the press briefing was concluded.]

- - -