

REMARKS

OF

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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

16TH NATIONAL INDIAN NATIONS CONFERENCE

ON

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AGUA CALIENTE RESERVATION, CA

Thank you, Darlene [Hutchinson]. It's a pleasure to be here today in beautiful Agua Caliente. I'm honored to join my fellow speakers and the hundreds of tribal leaders, victim advocates, criminal justice professionals and concerned tribal members who made the journey to southern California. It is a privilege to be part of this important gathering.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment in honor of this National Day of Mourning for former President George H.W. Bush. As Vice President, Mr. Bush was part of the Reagan Administration's ground-shifting approach to victims' rights and services, which brought us the landmark Victims of Crime Act that now funds thousands of victim assistance programs across the country.

As President, he continued the march toward greater recognition of victims' rights by signing into law several important bills that expanded victims' participation in the justice system. He was also fiercely dedicated to service. He once said, "No definition of a successful life can do anything but include serving others." As we meet here to discuss meeting the needs of victims, I think it's appropriate that we bear in mind the commitment to service that he so exemplified.

Again, I am honored to be here with all of you. I come from Iowa, where I served as U.S. Attorney and had the opportunity a number of years ago to participate in a victims of crime conference much like this one. The conference was a regional training sponsored along with my counterparts in Kansas and Nebraska, and we welcomed tribes from across all three states.

I remember it as an excellent opportunity to talk about the issues that face all of us, across the federal government and throughout Indian country. I also remember it as a unique chance to pool ideas and problem-solve on behalf of the citizens we protect and the victims we serve. It was a positive and productive experience, and I'm hopeful we can replicate it here.

I'd like to thank our emcees, Professor Deer and Ms. Stoner. And of course, thanks to my colleague, Darlene Hutchinson, who I'm privileged to serve with every day, and the staff of our Office for Victims of Crime for leading the planning for this conference. With the help of our friends at the Tribal Law and Policy Institute, they've put together a comprehensive agenda that covers a full range of tribal justice, safety and victim services issues. We can all look forward to an interesting and instructive three days.

I'm pleased to bring greetings from the Acting Attorney General, Matt Whitaker, who sends his best wishes for a successful conference. On his behalf, I want to convey our appreciation for the work you all do to protect and serve the people of your communities. The safety of American Indian and Alaska Native citizens, and the health and healing of victims in Indian country, are of paramount importance to the Department of Justice.

I share his gratitude, and his commitment to supporting Indian nations as you fight crime and serve victims. We're proud, at the Office of Justice Programs, to work alongside our tribal partners to help take on the challenge of protecting communities and healing those who have suffered at the hands of criminals.

We know that the work you do is often done in the face of serious obstacles and in the shadow of historical trauma. In spite of these challenges, you are finding ways to ensure the safety and well-being of those you serve. I commend you for it, and I thank you on behalf of the Department of Justice for your tireless work to promote justice and security in your communities.

But expressions of gratitude are not enough. We need to help make sure you have the resources necessary to protect the people of your communities, and we also have an obligation as stewards of federal funds to direct our investments to effective programs that support victims and reduce crime.

I am privileged to lead an agency whose primary responsibility is to support tribes and local and state governments in their work to safeguard their citizens. The Office of Justice Programs is devoting historic levels of funding to fighting crime in Indian country and aiding those who suffer from violence.

During the fiscal year that just ended, the Justice Department's grant-making offices – my agency, the COPS Office, and the Office on Violence Against Women – awarded 225 grants totaling more than \$113 million to 125 separate tribes under our Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS), which is our primary stream of funding available to tribes.

For those of you who aren't familiar with CTAS, it allows tribes to apply for Justice Department grants based on their own public safety needs. Before CTAS, tribal grant solicitations would set narrow, sometimes even arbitrary, parameters that didn't always conform with tribal needs.

With CTAS, tribes can search grant opportunities by purpose area – whether it's serving sexual assault survivors, helping tribal youth or any of the other general purpose areas, including a new one this year that focuses on addressing violent crime, and a re-tooled emphasis on victim services. Tribes then submit an application that outlines their public safety goals, as opposed to the generic goals established by us. We are seeking to move away from trying to fit square pegs into round holes.

But when it comes to meeting the needs of victims in Indian country, CTAS is not our only program. The Office of Justice Programs awarded almost \$6 billion in grants in fiscal year 2018. We supported law enforcement and corrections agencies, juvenile justice and child protection programs, and a variety of research and technology projects. But the bulk of the money – some \$4.4 billion, an unprecedented amount of funding – is slated for programs to help victims.

Included in that amount was \$133 million that was set aside specifically to meet the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native victims. This, too, is unprecedented. We expect to finish awarding these grants by mid-April, and once awarded, they will – we very much hope – substantially expand the number of tribes providing victim services, and the quality and quantity of services being provided.

These awards will support child and elder victims, domestic violence and sexual assault survivors, victims of human trafficking, families of homicide victims and people who have been victimized as a result of the opioid crisis. The President’s budget request for fiscal year 2019 proposes a comparable percentage of set-aside funds to help solidify the long-term sustainability of these tribal victim assistance programs.

These grants will have the potential to bring critical services to countless victims. Darlene and I – and the dedicated staff of our Office for Victims of Crime – are committed to making these programs as effective and as responsive to victims’ needs as possible, especially because this funding can vary from year to year. These new grants are a unique opportunity and we want to make sure the programs they support are strong and sustainable.

And because we want these programs to take root and succeed well into the future, OVC has created a separate program designed to ensure the long-term viability of each project we fund. A new financial management training and technical assistance program will offer tribes guidance on how to build and sustain infrastructures that support effective grant administration.

Our goal is to help tribes build strong financial foundations that will improve efficiency and sustainability and ensure success in meeting the needs of victims in your communities – and not just for the life of the grant, but well beyond it. Again, we know how critical these services are, and we want to make sure that they gain a firm foothold in your tribal communities.

We’re also looking to the future, not just of our grant investments, but of tribal victim services as a whole. We understand that one of the challenges of serving native victims is getting trained advocates out to remote areas of Indian country. We want to make sure that these critical jobs are not just filled, but filled with skilled and dedicated providers.

OVC has initiated a program to enlist college students to these positions. The candidates will work either directly with tribal victim assistance programs or with victim specialists in the BIA districts. Our hope is that this initiative will excite students into service and expand tribes’ capacity to reach and serve victims.

We know, too, that the majority of native people in our country do not live on tribal land. Many of them, in fact, live in urban areas, where they face a different set of challenges from those we see in Indian country. One of those challenges is a disproportionate vulnerability to sex trafficking.

Indian women and girls are sometimes moved off reservations and forced into trafficking activities in the city. In addition to the horrific trauma that this kind of exploitation causes, it also means that they are often dragged into the criminal justice system by virtue of being arrested.

OVC has made three awards to urban organizations to address this urgent problem under a program called Project Beacon. Grantees in Albuquerque, Seattle, and Chicago are developing community partnerships to meet the needs of American Indian victims. The grants support a range of services, from emergency shelter and housing to crisis counseling and treatment.

These victims have, in many cases, been violently displaced, uprooted and separated from their families and support networks. Our goal through these grants is to return them to safety and to help them begin the process of recovery and healing.

In addition to these grant resources, the Department of Justice is backing tribal efforts to enforce tribal laws and protect victims. We recently expanded a program that gives tribes greater access to national crime information systems. The Tribal Access Program, or TAP, as we call it, enables tribal officials to enter protection orders in federal databases and register sex offenders with the National Sex Offender Registry.

TAP can be a key element in ensuring the safety of certain victims. It also allows tribes to access critical data from FBI databases. Nearly 50 tribes are part of the program, and we hope to bring that number up to more than 70 before the end of 2019. If 100 want it, we are happy to find the resources to make it happen.

TAP has been at the center of a number of public safety successes. In one kidnapping case, it gave tribal officials access to investigative reports in several other jurisdictions, which led to the capture of the suspect and the recovery of a vulnerable victim. In another case, TAP helped prevent a domestic violence offender from purchasing a firearm.

These are cases in which serious crimes were ended or prevented, and victims were brought to safety. We see TAP as a powerful tool for protecting tribal communities and tribal members, and we are eager to expand it. Our ultimate goal is to make this program available to tribes throughout the country.

The TAP program, the tribal mapping initiative Darlene mentioned earlier and our nearly quarter-billion dollars in grant investments last fiscal year represent historic opportunities to help tribes protect citizens and serve American Indian and Alaska Native victims. We are standing with Indian nations in the fight against crime and injustice, and we offer our steadfast support to those of you engaged in the work of healing and recovery.

We hope that we can continue a frank and open dialogue about the challenges that remain. We want to continue to work with you to protect your communities, serve your victims and establish effective justice systems.

On behalf of all of us at the Office of Justice Programs and the Department of Justice, I thank you for all you do for the people of your communities and for the safety of our country. We are grateful.

Thank you.

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