Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks for the introduction, Larry [Thompson]. I am honored to be here, and grateful for the invitation to speak to this group.

I understand it isn’t typical for an Attorney General to speak at a compliance conference such as this, so I should explain why I am here. I thought this would be a good opportunity to convey two important messages.

First, I want to thank you for working so hard to ensure that your companies and clients do the right thing.

The Department of Justice investigates and prosecutes people and companies that break the law – including laws that criminalize corporate misconduct. That is an incredibly important responsibility, and the men and women of our department take it seriously. Our work ensures that law-breaking is punished, and helps deter future bad behavior. I think I have the experience to properly evaluate a case. We will enforce the law and not back down to powerful forces – but we will be fair – equal justice to poor and rich.

But each case we bring may be a sign that something has already gone wrong. That is what your work seeks to prevent, by building strong cultures of compliance within your companies to deter illegal and unethical conduct. We applaud those efforts. Our department would much rather have people and companies obey the law and do the right thing, so we don’t have to see them in court.

Your good work makes our jobs easier, and it makes your companies and our country better.

So on behalf of the Department of Justice, I thank you, once again, for doing this vital work. We have done our part to reward effective compliance programs and to better understand your efforts; you have my commitment that we will continue to do so.

The second message I want to make clear today is that under my leadership, the Department of Justice remains committed to enforcing all the laws. That includes laws regarding corporate misconduct, fraud, foreign corruption and other types of white-collar crime.

I understand there can be some uncertainty when there is a new Administration or new leadership at the Justice Department.

As you are probably aware, I have spent my first weeks as Attorney General ensuring that our department strengthens its focus on some key issues. For example, we need to turn back the recent surge in violent crime and murder that is troubling many of our cities. We need to restore a lawful system of immigration that upholds the rule of law and keeps us safe. And we must disrupt the transnational cartels, gangs and human traffickers that are bringing drugs and violence into our communities and which threaten the integrity of legal systems and even nation states.

These are important priorities for our department. But focusing on these challenges does not mean we will reduce our efforts in other areas.

As we re-double our efforts to combat violent crime, we will still enforce the laws that protect American consumers and ensure that honest businesses aren’t placed at a disadvantage. This Department of Justice will continue to
investigate and prosecute corporate fraud and misconduct; bribery; public corruption; organized crime; trade-secret theft; money laundering; securities fraud; government fraud; health care fraud; and Internet fraud, among others.

The Department of Justice not only has a duty to uphold the rule of law, which makes our country so great, but we also have a responsibility to protect American consumers. These laws are in place for a reason. When they are broken, it has real consequences in people’s lives.

We will also enforce these laws so we can protect honest businesses. Companies that obey the law and do the right thing should not be at a disadvantage simply because their competitors choose to break the rules.

One area where this is critical is enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). Congress enacted this law 40 years ago, when some companies considered it a routine expense to bribe foreign officials in order to gain business advantages abroad.

This type of corruption harms free competition, distorts prices, and often leads to substandard products and services coming into this country. It also increases the cost of doing business, and hurts honest companies that don’t pay these bribes.

Our department wants to create an even playing field for law-abiding companies. We will continue to strongly enforce the FCPA and other anti-corruption laws. Companies should succeed because they provide superior products and services, not because they have paid off the right people.

Let me conclude by briefly making two final points about our approach to this work.

The Department of Justice will continue to emphasize the importance of holding individuals accountable for corporate misconduct. It is not merely companies, but specific individuals, who break the law. We will work closely with our law enforcement partners, both here and abroad, to bring these persons to justice.

Also, when we make charging decisions, we will continue to take into account whether companies have good compliance programs; whether they cooperate and self-disclose their wrongdoing; and whether they take suitable steps to remediate problems.

For years, the Department of Justice has directed our prosecutors to consider these factors when making charging decisions. The U.S. Sentencing Guidelines also provide for substantial penalty reductions for companies that self-disclose, cooperate and accept responsibility for their misconduct. These principles will still guide our prosecutorial discretion determinations.

Our economy, and indeed, our whole system of self-government, depends on people believing that those who choose to disregard the law will be caught and punished. This is ultimately the responsibility of the Justice Department.

But more broadly, it depends on people and companies choosing of their own accord to obey the law and do the right thing. Making this happen is a larger task — one that is entrusted to all of us. Each of you plays an essential role in this work. So once again, thank you for your efforts, and thank you for listening to me today.

Speaker:
Attorney General Jeff Sessions

Topic(s):
StopFraud

Component(s):
Office of the Attorney General

Updated April 24, 2017