



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF
FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

FOR A HEARING ENTITLED

**THE BAKKEN: EXAMINING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS LAW
ENFORCEMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT NEEDS**

PRESENTED

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Before the Subcommittee on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Federal Programs
and the Federal Workforce
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
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Good afternoon Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished Members of the Committee. I am pleased to speak with you about federal law enforcement efforts in the Bakken oilfields of Montana and North Dakota. The Bakken region has faced a significant increase in drug trafficking and serious and violent crime, such as homicides, assaults, thefts, burglaries, vandalism, and highway accidents caused by the explosion of population growth. In response, the Department of Justice has developed and implemented a multi-agency law enforcement strategy for the Bakken region with notable law enforcement success.

I. Introduction

The development of the Bakken oil fields of northeastern Montana, northwestern North Dakota, and southern Saskatchewan has caused a sharp spike in both population and income levels. Between 2005 and 2012, the population in the Williston Basin region – driven by the addition of more than 20,000 jobs – grew an estimated 17 percent. The Williston Basin/Bakken Shale, spans approximately 150,000 square miles in northeastern Montana, western North Dakota and Saskatchewan, Canada. This influx of highly paid oil field workers into an area with limited opportunities for spending their income has created a market for drugs and contributed to an overall increase in crime. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Report shows that crimes in the Williston Basin region increased 32 percent from 2005 through 2011, and violent crimes (which include murder, aggravated assault, forcible rape, and robbery) increased 121 percent. For example, the Bakken region has experienced a large influx of Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs attempting to facilitate the illegal drug trade and prostitution. Law enforcement intelligence also indicates a rising presence of Mexican drug trafficking organizations in this area. These dramatic increases have overwhelmed state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies working with limited resources.¹

¹ Office of National Drug Control, Executive Office of the President, *National Drug Control Strategy*, 47 (2014), accessible at, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/ondcp/policy-and-research/ndcs_2014.pdf.

II. The Department of Justice's Response

In April 2012, the United States Attorneys' Offices for the District of Montana and the District of North Dakota convened a law enforcement strategy session in Glasgow, Montana to address the exponential rise in crime in the Bakken Region. More than 150 federal, state, local, international, and tribal law enforcement personnel from Montana, North Dakota, and Canada attended this meeting. The "Project Safe Bakken" strategy emerged from this session and remains a high priority for the United States Attorneys' Offices for Montana and North Dakota.

Project Safe Bakken's mission is to coordinate and synchronize the law enforcement efforts between federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement entities. The purpose is to detect, disrupt, and dismantle organized criminal enterprises that distribute illegal drugs and commit other crimes in the Bakken region of Montana and North Dakota. To that end, the United States Attorneys for Montana and North Dakota, the Attorneys General for Montana and North Dakota, and federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement have formed a task force to share intelligence and combat crime in the Bakken region and affected communities, including Fort Peck and Fort Berthold Indian Reservations. The National Guard assists these efforts by providing intelligence support including collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence data. The task force is also augmented with state and local law enforcement agencies.

Since the inception of Project Safe Bakken in 2012, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Montana has indicted 117 defendants on federal drug trafficking charges specific to the Bakken region. In one case, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Montana successfully prosecuted the leader of a large methamphetamine drug trafficking organization. This defendant, Robert Farrell Armstrong, received 20 years in prison for trafficking large volumes of almost-pure meth from Washington State for distribution in the Bakken region. The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Montana has also opened cases involving child pornography, oil/gas scams, worker endangerment, and environmental crimes.

Similarly, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of North Dakota has also seen a caseload increase in western North Dakota from 126 defendants in 2009 to 336 in 2013. While these numbers include defendants charged with all crimes, the exploding caseload is due in significant part to an increase in organized drug trafficking prosecutions. For example, a two-year FBI-led investigation into organized heroin trafficking in New Town, Williston and Watford City called Operation's Winter End has led to the conviction of more than 60 defendants.

The increase in federal cases reflects the presence of additional federal agents in eastern Montana and western North Dakota since 2013. All federal agencies with a presence in the area have dispatched additional federal agents into the communities in the Bakken region to develop

and investigate cases and target those who violate federal and state laws. The U.S. Marshals Service in North Dakota, for instance, has coordinated four sex offender compliance checks with state and local agencies in the Bakken region during the past three years, and completed over 375 case assessments and 71 investigations on reported unregistered sex offenders.

The Department of Justice has also responded with training and financial assistance to state, local, and tribal law enforcement. Since 2012, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Montana has coordinated at least five separate trainings for state, local, and tribal officers. Additionally, the Drug Enforcement Administration has conducted a two-week "Drug Investigation School" in North Dakota for Bakken drug agents.

On April 25, 2014, the Department's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) announced the release of two grant solicitations as part of a new \$3 million special initiative for the Bakken Region. OVW's Bakken Region Initiative will support the expansion of services to victims of sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking in Indian Country as well as aid the local criminal justice system in responding to these crimes by providing the resources for Tribal Special Assistant U.S. Attorneys. These prosecutors will maintain an active violence against women crimes caseload in tribal and federal courts, while also helping to promote higher quality investigations, improved training and better inter-governmental communication. On August 26, 2014, Associate Attorney General Tony West announced that the recipients of the Bakken Region Initiative are Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, Poplar, Montana; First Nations Women's Alliance, Devils Lake, North Dakota; Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Helena, Montana; North Dakota Council on Abused Women's Services, Bismarck, North Dakota; and Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, New Town, North Dakota. In addition, the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana and the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota are each receiving a grant to support a Tribal Special Assistant U.S. Attorney.

III. Conclusion

Project Safe Bakken illustrates the dynamic working partnership in Montana and North Dakota between federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement entities to combat crime and address public safety issues. The U.S. Attorneys for the District of Montana and the District of North Dakota are committed to communication, coordination, and collaboration with our law enforcement partners to promote public safety in this area.

We are already witnessing encouraging signs by the willingness of all levels of government to work cooperatively in addressing the challenges posed by crime in the Bakken, but understand that systemic long-term changes will be necessary in order to provide security to the region. Although the Bakken encompasses hundreds of miles, the FBI has deployed agents on rotating details to Sidney, Montana and created a new squad for western North Dakota. The

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) have also dispatched agents from Billings to work cases in the Bakken region. As part of Project Safe Bakken launched last year, Federal agencies are combining their efforts and resources to detect, disrupt, and dismantle drug trafficking organizations and criminal enterprises that are operating in the Bakken region. These efforts have helped produce the criminal prosecutions discussed above.

Thank you for the opportunity to address these critical issues with the Committee today and I look forward to taking your questions.