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A HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE DISCUSSION

Last week I took part in an unprecedented meeting of more than 50 local, state and federal law enforcement officials in Las Vegas to discuss polygamy-related crimes and new, cooperative steps to address them.

The day-long meeting received little media attention because the sensitive information being shared required closed doors. But it would be hard to overstate the meeting's importance in advancing our efforts to strengthen the rule of law in the communities of Colorado City, Ariz., and Hildale, Utah.

The meeting built on the excellent cooperation established between Arizona and Utah over the past several years. Attending were top state and local law enforcement officials from Arizona, Utah, Nevada and Texas, along with the U.S. attorneys from Arizona, Utah and the Northern District of Texas. Participation by the federal officials is highly significant because some of the wrongdoing suspected by law enforcement, such as civil rights violations and financial crimes, falls under federal and not state jurisdiction.

The meeting was held in Nevada because the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) now runs many of its businesses and conducts underage marriages ceremonies in that state. This activity has occurred, in large degree, as a response to legal pressure applied to the FLDS in Arizona and Utah over the past six years. Texas, of course, is actively engaged in investigating the FLDS community now established in that state for possible wrongdoing. Our common purpose is to eliminate state or national borders as a refuge for criminal activities.

Much of the discussions focused on bringing everyone up to speed on the history of the FLDS and legal efforts underway in each of the four states. We agreed that all future prosecutions should be undertaken by whatever office has the strongest legal position, and that every prosecution should count on the full support of all other agencies -- local, state or federal -- with relevant information or expertise.

The meeting also addressed our shared concern that children in the FLDS communities may not be receiving adequate education. As many as 1,000 children in Colorado City/Hildale have been removed from public and private schools, but only a few have been registered for home-schooling. I have asked Tom Horne, Arizona's superintendent of public instruction, to determine the status of these children and what actions the state can take if they are not enrolled in school as required by state law.

Substantial progress has been made on many fronts in restoring the rule of law in the FLDS communities. FLDS leader Warren Jeffs has been convicted and sentenced to prison in Utah and awaits trial in Arizona. The Colorado City School District was placed in receivership. Jeffs and his associates were removed from control of the United Effort Trust, and a special fiduciary appointed. Six Colorado City police officers have been decertified. And perhaps most important in the long run, a safety net has been created by a broad group of government and nonprofit agencies to reach out and assist current and potential crime victims.

The cooperation pledged by participants at last week's Las Vegas meeting promises to fortify our ongoing efforts. Law enforcement stands more unified than ever in our shared commitment to protect children and prosecute crime in the FLDS communities.



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