



Attorney general: Drug trafficking offenses on decline



By [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) - Spring 2015 Feb 18, 2015



Attorney General Eric Holder shares plans for his final days in office at an event Tuesday at the National Press Club. He said he expects the case involving the president's immigration order to be decided favorably at the Supreme Court. SHFWire photo by Jordan Gass- Pooré

WASHINGTON – The decision by a federal judge in Texas to temporarily block an executive order on immigration is only an “interim step” in a lengthy process, [Attorney General Eric Holder](#) said Tuesday at a National Press Club event.

[U.S. District Judge Andrew S. Hanen](#) issued the [ruling](#) late Monday, [siding with 26 states](#) that believe President Barack Obama overstepped his

legal authority when he created a plan that would potentially help millions of undocumented immigrants avoid deportation. The Justice Department appealed Monday's actions Tuesday in Brownsville, Texas.

"I've always expected this is a matter that'll ultimately be decided by a higher court – if not the Supreme Court, then a federal court of appeals," Holder said.

With his term as attorney general nearing its end, Holder fielded questions during the luncheon speech that ranged from Wall Street to civil rights and the death penalty.

Holder said the Justice Department's review of death penalty practices is still underway and won't be completed under his term.

Based on evidence so far, Holder, who opposes the death penalty, said lethal injection shouldn't occur while the U.S. Supreme Court reviews whether the death penalty is consistent with the Constitution.

Holder said he disagreed with [Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia](#) that there's no evidence that the country's criminal justice system has executed a person for a crime they didn't commit.

"That, from my perspective, is the ultimate nightmare," he said.

Holder has pressed for criminal justice reforms since 2013, when he introduced the [Smart on Crime](#) initiative to reduce sentencing for low-level, non-violent drug offenders.

He backed the success of this initiative with preliminary figures announced Tuesday by the [U.S. Sentencing Commission](#) that show a 6 percent reduction in the number of defendants charged with drug trafficking offenses.

While the number of these cases has dropped, the average minimum prison term has risen from 96 to

98 months. Holder said this demonstrates that the most serious drug crimes are now attracting more scrutiny.

Holder also answered questions about American members of the Islamic State group who return to the U.S., particularly how the Justice Department can find and prosecute them.

“That is the thing as I leave office that keeps me up at night,” Holder said.

Holder said before he leaves office the Justice Department will announce the results of investigations into the fatal shooting of Michael Brown last year in Ferguson, Mo. Prosecutors are deciding whether to bring criminal charges against the police officer who shot Brown and to investigate Ferguson Police Department practices.

In an aside, Holder said that, although he’s mentioned this before, he has asked U.S. attorneys to review cases of financial fraud involving banks and submit a report to the Justice Department in 90 days to determine whether charges should be filed against individuals involved.

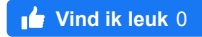
[Loretta Lynch](#), Holder’s successor, will ultimately make those determinations. Holder, who has been attorney general since Obama began his presidency, announced his retirement in September and is now waiting for Congress to confirm Lynch. A vote is expected in March.

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Jordan Gass-Pooré is a Spring 2015 reporter for the SHFWire from Texas State University.



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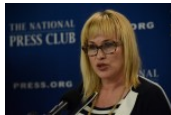
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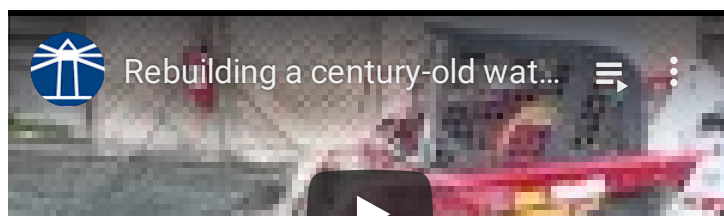


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