

Trump says nationwide immigration raids set to begin Sunday

By ELLIOT SPAGAT
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Friday portrayed an upcoming national operation targeting immigrant families as a routine effort that could capture about 200 people and detain them in hotels before they are deported.

Matthew Albence, acting director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, made his comments to The Associated Press as President Donald Trump said the nationwide deportation sweep will begin this weekend.

“It starts on Sunday and they’re going to take people out and they’re going to bring them back to their countries or they’re going to take criminals out, put them in prison, or put them in prison in the countries they came from. We are focused on criminals as much as we can before we do anything else,” Trump said.

The operation will target people with final deportation orders in 10 major cities, including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Miami, and predominantly focus on Central American families who



AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee

Flyers in English and Spanish are shown stacked at a nearby restaurant before immigration advocates gather them and hand them out Thursday in the Little Havana neighborhood in Miami. The Trump administration is moving forward with a nationwide immigration enforcement operation this weekend targeting migrant families.

have arrived at the U.S. border with Mexico in unprecedented numbers.

The operation further inflamed the political debate over immigration as Trump appeals to his base with a pledge to crack down on migrants and Democrats cast the president and his administration as inhumane for going after families.

The reality is that the operation is similar to one in

2016 under President Barack Obama and another in 2017 under Trump. The Obama-era operation resulted in about 10% of those targeted being arrested, and the Trump effort had a lower arrest rate, Albence said.

That means the operation, targeting 2,000 people, could yield about 200 arrests based on previous crackdowns. Trump has said on Twitter that his agents plan to arrest

millions of immigrants in the country illegally.

“This family operation is nothing new,” Albence told the AP. “It’s part of our day-to-day operations.”

It is highly unusual to announce an enforcement sting before it begins. The president postponed the effort once before after a phone call with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, but immigration officials said it was also due in

part to law enforcement concerns over officer safety because details had leaked.

But they’re pressing ahead with this one, even though the president and other administration officials have discussed the long-planned family operation for weeks.

“Nothing to be secret about,” Trump said. “If the word gets out, it gets out because hundreds of people know about it.”

The family operation will focus on 10 court dockets with large numbers of families that have arrived recently and been ordered to leave the country, but that doesn’t mean arrests will be limited to those areas, Albence said. Authorities will go where their investigations lead, even if it’s five states away.

The operation will target entire families that have been ordered removed, but some family may be separated if some members are in the country legally. Albence gave a hypothetical example of a father and child in the U.S. illegally but a mother who isn’t.

“If the mother wants to return voluntarily on her own with the family, she’ll have an opportunity to do so,” he said.

Families will be tempo-

rarily housed in hotels until they can be transferred to a detention center or deported, Albence said.

That has prompted backlash from hotel chains that don’t want anything to do with detained families and ICE agents in their rooms and hallways. Marriott said it would not allow ICE to use its hotels for holding immigrants.

Albence said if ICE runs out of space, it may be forced to separate some family members. The government is not allowed to detain family members together in traditional jails.

“If hotels or other places do not want to allow us to utilize that, it’s almost forcing us into a situation where we’re going to have to take one of the parents and put them in custody and separate them from the rest of their families,” he said.

Meanwhile, activists ramped up efforts to prepare by bolstering know-your-rights pocket guides, circulating information about hotlines and planning public demonstrations. Vigils outside of detention centers and hundreds of other locations nationwide were set for Friday evening, to be followed by protests Saturday in Miami and Chicago.

Acosta exits; Trump’s big Cabinet turnover keeps growing

By DARLENE
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WASHINGTON — Adding to the lengthy list of departures from President Donald Trump’s Cabinet, Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta said Friday he’s stepping down amid the tumult over his handling of a 2008 secret plea deal with wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein, who is accused of sexually abusing underage girls.

Trump, with Acosta at his side, said Friday he did not ask his secretary to leave and “I hate to see this happen.” The president, who publicly faults the news media almost daily, said Acosta put the blame there, too.

Acosta “informed me this morning that he felt the constant drumbeat of press about a prosecution which took place under his watch more than 12 years ago was bad for the Administration, which he so strongly believes in, and he graciously tendered his resignation,” Trump tweeted later in the day.

Trump said Pat Pizzella, the department’s deputy secretary since April 2018, would succeed Acosta on an acting basis.

Pizzella served in the administrations of Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Barack Obama. A coalition of civil rights, human rights, labor and other groups opposed his nomination by Trump to the department’s No. 2 slot, citing Pizzella’s record on labor rights.

Acosta was the U.S. attorney in Miami when he oversaw a 2008 non-prosecution agreement that allowed Epstein to avoid federal trial but plead guilty to state charges and serve 13 months



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

President Donald Trump speaks to members of the media with Secretary of Labor Alex Acosta on the South Lawn of the White House on Friday before Trump boards Marine One for a short trip to Andrews Air Force Base, Md. and then on to Wisconsin.

in jail. Similar charges filed against Epstein by federal prosecutors in New York this week had put Acosta’s handling of the 2008 agreement with the now-jailed financier back in the spotlight.

Years ago, Epstein had counted Trump and former President Bill Clinton among his friends, but Trump said this week he was “not a fan.”

Acosta said he didn’t want his handling of Epstein’s case to overshadow the president’s agenda and said his resignation would be effective in seven days.

“My point here today is we have an amazing economy, and the focus needs to be on the economy,” he said.

Top Democratic lawmakers and presidential candidates had demanded that Acosta resign. But Acosta had defended his actions, insisting at a news conference Wednesday that he got the toughest deal on Epstein that he could at the time.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said he should never have been appointed by Trump and confirmed by the Senate. “Thank God he’s gone,” she said.

Acosta had also frustrated some conservatives who wanted him gone long before the Epstein uproar. Among their objections were his decisions to proceed with several employment discrimination lawsuits and to allow certain Obama administration holdovers to keep their jobs.

His resignation extends a record level of turnover at the highest levels of Trump’s administration, with acting secretaries at key departments, including the Pentagon and Homeland Security. Roughly two-thirds of the Cabinet has turned over by the two-and-a-half year mark of Trump’s term.

Only the departments of Treasury, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Education, Energy, Commerce and Agriculture continue with the leaders that were first confirmed. Epstein, 66, reached the deal in Florida in 2008 to secretly end a federal sex abuse investigation involving at least 40 teenage girls that could have landed him behind bars for life. He instead pleaded guilty to Florida state charges, spent 13 months in

jail, paid settlements to victims and registered as a sex offender.

A federal judge has said Acosta violated federal law by keeping Epstein’s victims in the dark about the plea arrangement, and the Justice Department has been investigating.

The deal came under scrutiny earlier this year after reporting by *The Miami Herald*.

Trump had defended Acosta earlier this week while saying he’d look “very closely” at his handling of the 2008 agreement.

Acosta had attempted to clear his name and held a news conference — encouraged by Trump — to defend his actions. In a 50-plus-minute lawyerly rebuttal, he

argued his office had secured the best deal it could and had worked in the best interests of Epstein’s victims.

“We did what we did because we wanted to see Epstein go to jail,” he said.

Pressed on whether he had any regrets, Acosta repeatedly said circumstances had changed since then.

“We now have 12 years of knowledge and hindsight and we live in a very different world,” he said. “Today’s world treats victims very, very differently.”

After federal attorneys in New York announced the new charges against Epstein this week, Acosta tweeted that he was pleased by their decision.

“The crimes committed by Epstein are horrific,” Acosta tweeted. “Now that new evi-

dence and additional testimony is available, the NY prosecution offers an important opportunity to more fully bring him to justice.”

Acosta took office as the nation’s 27th labor secretary in early 2017, leading a sprawling agency that enforces more than 180 federal laws covering about 10 million employers and 125 million workers. The department also plays a role in combatting human trafficking.

Before he was named a U.S. attorney, Acosta was an assistant attorney general for the civil rights division in President George W. Bush’s first term. Before joining the Trump administration, he was dean of the Florida International University law school.

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