

**Title: Jeff Sessions Abandons the Social Sector**  
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**Date: July 6, 2017**

## The Lane Report

During Jeff Sessions' four terms as a U. S. Senator from Alabama, his anti-abortion and anti-immigration positions were well known. He was skeptical of climate change and hostile to same-sex marriages. On criminal justice issues, he was a champion of "law and order," stern marijuana prohibition and the unregulated use of civil forfeiture by law enforcement agencies. No wonder Sessions' nomination as U.S. Attorney General was fervently opposed by progressives.

Now that he's leading the Department of Justice, Sessions is no less controversial.

The Attorney General has been a vocal opponent of his Department's long-standing practice of negotiating civil and criminal settlement agreements with corporate defendants that include donations to nonprofit organizations. He sees such payments as "slush funds" which have historically supported left-leaning social justice and environmental groups.

On June 5, while the nation's attention was focused on the firestorm ignited by President Trump's dismissal of former FBI director James Comey, Attorney General Sessions banned federal attorneys from reaching settlements in criminal and civil cases that require defendants to make payments to third parties. Settlement funds are now to be used, in Sessions' words, only "to compensate victims, redress harm and deter unlawful conduct."

Sessions has complained about settlement recipients including Republican boogymen the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, which works to expand access to financial services in poor communities; the National Council of La Raza, or "The Race," a Latino advocacy group which he claims supports mass illegal immigration; and the National Urban League, an iconic civil rights organization.

Backing the Attorney General's action, Tom Fitton, the president of Judicial Watch, the conservative public interest law firm, told Breitbart News, "The Justice Department should be in the business of upholding the rule of law, not misusing its powers to extort monies for favored interest groups." Paul Larkin, a legal scholar at the conservative Heritage Foundation, goes even farther, suggesting that the practice may even be illegal in that "it allows the Justice Department to pick and

choose among organizations that should receive federal funds without any guidance from Congress or any oversight by the Judiciary or Appropriations Committees in either chamber.”

The truth is that under both Republican and Democratic administrations over the last four decades, Attorneys General have used settlements to help fund advocacy groups that fight for people and communities hurt by the wrongdoing the Department of Justice was doing its best to reverse. As Lisa Foster, the former director of the Department's Office for Access to Justice, told HuffPo, “The Justice Department has an obligation to the people of the United States and when it brings affirmative litigation to correct wrongdoing by anyone, it should be thinking broadly about remedies that help correct the harm.”

That means funding groups to help the poor and minorities redress injustices. And it means paying for projects managed by community groups and nonprofit organizations that help compensate for illegal pollution by restoring wetlands and streams, protecting critical habitat, monitoring air pollution and treating asthma victims.

Let's heed Mr. Larkin's concern and, after next year's election, urge the new Congress to override the Attorney General's ill-considered edict. The social sector – and all of us – would be far better off.



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