



SPEECH

It's Not Personal Sonny, It's Strictly Business: Aggressive Enforcement to Protect a Free Market

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Remarks as Prepared for Delivery at George Washington Law School by [Acting Assistant Attorney General Omeed A. Assefi](#) of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division

Good evening. Thank you for having me here — it is a pleasure to join you all. I'd first like to thank George Washington Law School for hosting this event and inviting me to speak today. GW Law is a fixture in the D.C. legal landscape, and the platform it provides to connect deep ideas with the real work of government is incredibly valuable. I'd also like to thank MLex, who is a go-to follow for all the real-time developments in our not-so-little antitrust world.

People often say that in politics, you campaign in poetry and govern in prose. Dialogues like this are an important part of how we connect the two and relate theory to practice.

I thought I'd start tonight by answering the question I am asked most often. People ask: what are your antitrust enforcement and policy philosophies?

Well, as we are in the second year of the Trump Administration, we have both laid out a policy vision and begun racking up enforcement wins that signal the direction of the movement going forward.

As we began 2025, the vision for America First antitrust at DOJ was clear: it “empowers America’s forgotten men and women to shape their own economic destinies in the free market.”^[1] This is the same approach that was adopted by our partners at the FTC through Chairman Andrew Ferguson.^[2] The approach is not a mystery. This Administration is focused on enforcing the law against the lawbreakers, getting out of the way of law-abiding businesses, and ultimately ensuring the free market supports the American Dream. Our desire for aggressive enforcement and a thriving free market is paired with our openness in forging a constructive dialogue with the antitrust bar to improve antitrust enforcement and compliance, respectively.

As a recovering criminal prosecutor, I’d just add two points. First, the economic harm associated with white-collar crime can be every bit as nefarious, and often more nefarious, than harm from violent crime. Just because price fixing and monopolization may appear more sophisticated and socially acceptable than picking someone’s pockets doesn’t make them any less harmful, particularly when antitrust offenses can impact millions of consumers and their way of life.

Second, antitrust enforcement isn’t only about bringing the economic benefits of the free market to the American people. It’s about delivering justice.

It is inevitable that some companies and their executives will continue to violate the antitrust laws and our free markets. Equally inevitable, however, is our Division’s unrelenting pursuit of holding wrongdoers accountable. To quote Hyman Roth in *Godfather II*, “this is the business we’ve chosen.”^[3] Meaning, businesses who choose to violate the antitrust laws and corrupt our free markets should know the consequences they’ll face from the Antitrust Division.

Now what does the prose look like?

The answer is simple. My job is to develop and support the incredible career staff of the Antitrust Division to empower them to do their work. The staff of the Antitrust Division are the most talented, hard-working people I’ve ever worked with. They represent the best the Department of Justice has to offer. And they are getting real results and delivering on this mission day in and day out.

While the media and very online pundits elect to view everything through a political lens, our Division is focused on building and bringing good cases that deliver the benefits of competition to the American people. The lack of headlines about the continued enforcement agenda this Division promotes every single day doesn’t make the genuine, impactful results any less real.

And we’re getting great results. With my time today, I’d like to talk about the great work we are doing across our program areas.

1. Finding and Prosecuting Criminal Antitrust Violations

Last year was a historic year for criminal antitrust enforcement. In 2025 alone, the Antitrust Division obtained 37 corporate and individual convictions. Comparing FY 2025 to FY 2024, the number of defendants sentenced to prison more than doubled, and the number of prison days imposed jumped by more than 1200 percent. Put simply: commit an antitrust crime, and the Antitrust Division will track you down, prosecute you, and put you behind bars. For decades, the criminal program accumulated and tracked its fines as a purported metric of success despite the clear lack of deterrent effect from financial settlements. Now, the number the criminal program exclusively tracks is the days of incarceration imposed.

There are few better examples of that commitment than our historic win in *United States v. Eduardo Lopez*.[\[4\]](#)

For years, armchair critics scoffed that prosecuting labor market collusion was a failed experiment and mocked the Division's prior enforcement actions in this area. Their recommendation? Pack up and go home. Just focus on moving financial settlement numbers up or down.

Our answer? To continue doing our job. In April 2025, a federal jury in Las Vegas proved that justice ultimately always prevails. Eddie Lopez, the CEO of a home healthcare staffing agency, chose to fix the wages of his own nurses. This way, he could line his own pockets while ensuring his own nurses would never receive higher wages and better benefits through open competition.

As is the case with most criminals, he didn't just stop there. He also schemed to keep the proceeds of his crime hidden from the buyer of his business.

And the jury agreed with the government, returning a guilty verdict on all counts — the first-ever criminal trial conviction for wage-fixing in American history. At sentencing, the court reinforced the point, imposing 40 months in prison and more than \$13 million in financial penalties. Furthermore, the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit denied Lopez's motion for bail pending appeal, and he began serving his imprisonment term earlier this month.

The message is clear: if you fix wages, we will seek your incarceration no matter the fine you're willing or able to pay. That is the business we've chosen.

The same story played out in our *Transmigrante* case spanning a dozen defendants across the U.S.-Mexico border.[\[5\]](#) A ringleader and his co-conspirators created a cartel and enforced it with violence — extorting millions, demanding a tax on every transaction, and punishing those who refused with kidnappings, firebombings, shootings, and murder.

With the help of law enforcement partners, the Antitrust Division dismantled that cartel and put its members behind bars, including one with an eleven-year prison term.

Known by some as “DOGE before DOGE,” our Procurement Collusion Strike Force continues to pursue those who prey on the American taxpayer. In 2025, cases across the country involved fraud on the U.S. military, exploitation of wildfire response contracts, bid rigging affecting roads and infrastructure, and schemes targeting public schools. Most recently in January 2026, Jasen Butler was convicted of 34 felonies in the Southern District of Florida for defrauding our military on fuel contracts.[\[6\]](#)

Far from being a mere technical crime, our attorneys proved that he was such a high-risk offender that the judge agreed to step him back into custody pending sentencing — an extraordinary step in an antitrust case.

We’ve also created more reasons for companies and individuals who are breaking the law to be concerned. In the summer of 2025, the Division launched its first-ever Whistleblower Rewards Program, offering up to 30 percent of recoveries over \$1 million. Within six months, the Program generated a flurry of tips, led to charges, and resulted in a \$1 million award, which we have good reason to believe will be the floor of future rewards.[\[7\]](#) Cartels depend on silence — from executives to employees across the company. The Division has now put a price on that silence.

The direction and associated message are unmistakable. The Division is building on a year of significant convictions, a twelve-fold increase in prison days, and new detection tools that are already delivering results.

2. Winning Meaningful Civil Relief for Consumers

Our civil enforcement successes have been similarly historic. Earlier this month, the DOJ achieved a remarkable milestone with its Live Nation settlement, securing the first antitrust divestitures in a monopolization case in recent years. Despite the attempts of those who try to make structural relief impossible, the settlement shows that it is a lawful and useful tool in the right circumstances. Thanks to its team of talented and dedicated litigators and economists, the Antitrust Division’s wide-ranging relief will free the ticketing and concert promotions ecosystem from the grip of Live Nation’s monopoly power.

Consider what the settlement includes: Ticketmaster will be forced to enable rival ticketers to sell tickets even when it controls the event. That’s consumer choice and — by enabling competition — affordability. Meanwhile, Live Nation will divest its control of many amphitheaters and dramatically loosen exclusive deals with others. For artists, that’s more choice, more control of their art, and yes, more competition. And Ticketmaster will cap ever-growing service fees at 15%. That’s affordability, again.

For the first time, concert ticketing will finally use technology that has been in place in other industries for years, including NFL tickets for nearly a decade. No prior administration was ever able to deliver this change. Opening the market to new technology and innovation will pave the way for even greater competition, better services, and lower prices. So too will freeing artists to

use rival promoters and gain insights into Live Nation's collection of their fans' data. The settlement does all this.

The Live Nation settlement follows another historic monopolization remedy ordered in the Google Search litigation.[\[8\]](#) The court-ordered remedy prevents Google from locking up search distribution in exclusive contracts and includes several measures to stimulate competition across the search ecosystem, including in the development of advanced AI products that search is evolving toward. Opening up markets to competition invites in entry and innovation, and that's exactly what antitrust remedies should do.

I'm similarly proud of the work we have underway. Since becoming Acting AAG earlier this year, I filed the first new civil conduct case of this administration.[\[9\]](#) Our case against OhioHealth targets anticompetitive restraints a dominant hospital system places on insurers that are designed to deprive patients of choice and that ultimately raise prices for healthcare. Fighting for lower costs and more choices in healthcare is exactly the kind of kitchen table priority we should be pursuing.

And we have several important cases in the pipeline. I am so proud of our incredible career staff who are developing hard cases that will deliver real relief to American consumers and workers.

3. Providing Expert Guidance on Antitrust Law and Policy

Finally, our policy, appellate, and international teams are firing on all cylinders. Our amicus and statement of interest programs have been incredibly active and successful. In just over a year, we have filed 14 statements of interest under this Administration. This past month, we broke a record when we filed three different statements of interest in a single day.[\[10\]](#)

Our statement of interest last year in *Texas v. Blackrock* was the first formal statement by the Antitrust Division and the FTC in federal court that addressed how common shareholdings are treated under the antitrust laws.[\[11\]](#) Like so many of our statements of interest, we were glad to see the court agree with our approach to the issues and cite our submission as a helpful guidepost.[\[12\]](#) Our statements of interest have also been critical in advocating for sound approaches to the intersection of intellectual property and antitrust,[\[13\]](#) and in supporting cases that address pocketbook issues like housing,[\[14\]](#) potato products,[\[15\]](#) and veterinary care.[\[16\]](#)

We are also working through how we can improve the guidance we provide to businesses in an effort to provide more predictability. As I said when I was Acting AAG last year,[\[17\]](#) having clear, stable guidance for the business community is a critical feature of a vigorous pro-enforcement agenda.

That is why we are considering whether to supplement our Merger Guidelines by reinstituting and improving upon the Competitor Collaboration Guidelines that were withdrawn in December

2024. Just last month, the Antitrust Division and the Federal Trade Commission opened a public inquiry seeking comments for consideration whether we should revise and reissue that guidance.[\[18\]](#) Comments are due April 24, and we very much look forward to getting a better sense through the public comments of how we can best serve the many law-abiding businesses that want to do the right thing and comply with the antitrust laws.

I am also so proud of the work of our International Section. They support the Division's important work in multilateral organizations such as the International Competition Network (ICN) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). And, on the bilateral side, I'm spending much of this week meeting with counterparts from competition agencies around the globe. My message will be clear: competition policy should be a neutral tool applied based on the law, not a tool for promoting national champions or attacking U.S. businesses. And competition policy works better when economies around the world are in dialogue with one another.

Conclusion

I want to close by underscoring what all this work shows: antitrust enforcement is a live, vital part of this Administration's approach to unleashing the free market.

We know that competition is a pillar of the American Dream. It's about economic opportunity and the freedom to build a business or a life for your family. It is those principles and the people we fight for that are the north star of this Division. Not the reality-free assessments that serve to reinforce people's pre-existing political agenda. Which is why I ask our attorneys, economists, paralegals, and support staff to focus on the results and justice they continue to obtain, not the empty feedback from those who have never been able to secure either. I ask them to focus on winning results, and they consistently do.

And perhaps equally as important as the great results have been the development of our staff this work enables. In *Lopez*, we had a trial attorney give his first opening at a jury trial and examine multiple civilian witnesses. In *Butler*, all 3 of our antitrust attorneys got their first jury trial experience. And in *Live Nation*, multiple trial attorneys similarly tried their first case before a jury and examined witnesses, something that many trial lawyers have never done. We at the Antitrust Division care about our results, but we care equally that our trial attorneys, paralegals, and economists have an opportunity to develop and grow. And you only develop by actually litigating the case yourself.

That's how we ensure tomorrow's lawbreakers will know a ready and capable Antitrust Division stands by to enforce the law against them.

Inside the Division, we are tuning out the noise and focusing on helping the American people who we are so privileged to serve. In fact, it's the business we've chosen.

Thank you.

[1] <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/assistant-attorney-general-gail-slater-delivers-first-antitrust-address-university-notre>

[2] See, e.g., Competition in the 21st Century: Heeding The Rallying Cry for Deregulation.

[3] The Godfather Part II (1974)

[4] See Office of Public Affairs | White-Collar Executive Incarcerated for Fixing Nurse Wages and Fraud | United States Department of Justice.

[5] See Office of Public Affairs | Texas Man Sentenced for Monopolizing International Transit Industry, Fixing Prices and Extorting Competitors | United States Department of Justice.

[6] See Southern District of Florida | Jury Convicts Florida Fuel Supplier of 34 Felonies at Trial in Multimillion-Dollar Scheme to Defraud U.S. Department of War and Other Federal Agencies | United States Department of Justice

[7] See Office of Public Affairs | Antitrust Division and U.S. Postal Service Make First-Ever Whistleblower Payment: \$1M Awarded for Reporting Antitrust Crime | United States Department of Justice

[8] See Office of Public Affairs | Department of Justice Wins Significant Remedies Against Google | United States Department of Justice

[9] See Office of Public Affairs | Justice Department Sues OhioHealth for Anticompetitive Healthcare Contracts That Increase Costs for Ohio Patients | United States Department of Justice

[10] The Division's Statements of Interest are available at <https://www.justice.gov/atr/statements-interest>.

[11] See *State of Texas, et al. v. Blackrock, Inc., et al.* Statement of Interest of The Federal Trade Commission and The United States of America (May 22, 2025).

[12] See *Texas v. BlackRock, Inc.*, No. 6:24-cv-437-JDK, slip op. (E.D. Tex. Aug. 1, 2025) (Kernodle, J.).

[13] See *Radian Memory Systems LLC v. Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd., and Samsung Electronics America, Inc.* Statement of Interest of the United States of America (June 24, 2025).

[14] See Jennifer Nosalek, et al. v. MLS Property Information Network, Inc., et al. Supplemental Statement of Interest of the United States (March 17, 2025).

[15] See In re: Frozen Potato Products Antitrust Litigation: Statement of Interest of the United States of America (February 27, 2026).

[16] See Lincoln Memorial University v. American Veterinary Medical Association: Statement of Interest of the United States (December 15, 2025).

[17] See Omeed Assefi, Use of the 2023 Merger Guidelines, February 18, 2025.

[18] See <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-and-federal-trade-commission-seek-public-comment-guidance-business>

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