

## ‘Trust Has Been Breached’

The broken relationship between Minnesota and the federal government



By Toluse Olorunnipa

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The state and local officials meeting with Tom Homan, who was put in charge of the federal immigration operation in Minnesota this week, have generally agreed that their encounters have been cordial and productive, a welcome change from the militaristic approach taken by his predecessor. Homan has also cast these discussions in a positive light, expressing optimism Thursday that “commonsense cooperation” on immigration enforcement in Minneapolis will allow him to draw down the thousands of agents that have flooded the city for the past two months.

But beyond the pleasantries, Homan is finding little appetite in Minnesota for the kind of targeted, aggressive immigration enforcement he has long sought to enact in Democratic-run cities and states. After the shooting deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal agents, there is even less trust among local leaders that the Trump administration can be a reliable partner.

Although Homan has acknowledged that the immigration surge in Minnesota has not “been perfect,” his upbeat predictions of a smooth and swift détente seem to underestimate how much ill will the Trump administration’s actions have caused among the state’s politicians, activists, and residents. The killings of Good and Pretti—each followed by a Trump-

administration push to denigrate the victims and box out local investigators—came against a backdrop of growing mistrust and frustration even among officials who have typically embraced partnership with their federal partners.

“One of the things that was exceedingly frustrating was the fact that they were putting out information that was just utterly and completely untrue,” Minnesota Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell told me.

Schnell met with Homan this week. The prison-systems leader told me that his agency felt it had no choice but to take the extraordinary step of creating a webpage to fact-check several statements made by the Department of Homeland Security, which claimed that the state was routinely releasing violent criminals onto the street.

Several of the convicted criminals DHS claimed it had “arrested” in Minnesota had actually been in his department’s custody when they were handed over to federal officials, Schnell said. These transfers, which took place without fanfare inside state prisons, belied the administration’s argument that it had sent 3,000 agents into Minnesota to hunt down criminals because it was not receiving cooperation from local officials. Speaking to reporters on Thursday, Homan acknowledged that the Department of Corrections had been honoring ICE detainers—requests from the federal government for information about inmates who may be subject to immigration removal proceedings.

The broader challenge for the Trump administration is that focusing on the kinds of violent criminals DHS has called “the worst of the worst” won’t produce the mass-deportation numbers that Trump has demanded. Schnell told me that he could find no justification for the administration’s claim that there were more than 1,360 inmates with ICE detainers in Minnesota. He said his office repeatedly sought clarity from DHS about the figure but received no answer, eventually opting to launch the webpage, which is titled “Combatting DHS Misinformation.” Schnell told me that the state prison system has only about 270 noncitizen inmates, or less than 3 percent of its total population of about 8,000. The large deployment of immigration officers to Minneapolis never made sense if the goal was to target violent criminals, he said.

“You’re talking about the worst of the worst; and then you send your 3,000 agents into schools and hospitals and churches and small businesses?” Schnell said. “Is that really where the worst of the worst are at?”

The Department of Homeland Security did not respond to a request for comment. The White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson told me the administration’s conversations with local officials were ongoing. “The Trump Administration remains committed to enforcing federal laws and ensuring all Americans feel safe in their communities,” she said by email. “Local leaders should work with us, not against us, to achieve this goal.”

Homan, the administration's "border czar," arrived in Minnesota this week and took the reins from Greg Bovino, the ousted Border Patrol commander. He said Thursday that federal immigration agents in the state will prioritize arresting violent criminals, while acknowledging that the operation—which has swept up refugees, children, and U.S. citizens with no criminal records—had "got away from" its core mission.

Police in Minnesota have said they support the removal of violent criminals from the community. But the federal government's actions have soured relations in a way that, for some, makes future coordination on immigration enforcement unlikely, current and former officials told me. In addition to killing two Minnesota residents, masked federal agents have roughed up protesters and created a sense of fear in the community.

"Trust has been breached, and I don't think you can get that back," Lucy Gerold, who served as a police officer in Minneapolis for more than 30 years, told me. "I think they've lost the trust and breached the ability to compromise or coordinate or cooperate."

Gerold said she unwittingly found herself in the midst of a federal immigration operation and was stunned by the lack of protocol and professionalism. Despite having shown up in six unmarked cars to make an arrest, the agents failed to secure the scene and control the flow of traffic. The mix of protesters, moving cars, and armed agents created chaos, she said. Although federal officials have said they want local police to help them perform such tasks more smoothly, the Minneapolis Police Department is reluctant to be associated with an operation that often appears disjointed, unprofessional, and hostile.

Days before Pretti was killed, Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara told me that it's "potentially damaging to the legitimacy of law enforcement" for his officers to be seen cooperating with a federal operation that many residents view as an invasion. Homan's desire for more support from local police faces other obstacles. The Minneapolis city council recently updated a rule spelling out the restrictions on how police can interact with federal immigration officers. Known as a "separation ordinance," it says Minneapolis must "vigorously oppose" any efforts to use its resources to support federal immigration enforcement, asserting that community trust would be "destroyed" if local officials are seen collaborating with Trump's mass-deportation teams.

"Enforcing federal civil immigration laws alongside federal agents who lack clear agency identification and/or who are masked or otherwise concealing their identities or badges would be contrary to the values of the city and harmful to the trust and public safety of city residents," the ordinance reads.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz each said they had productive meetings with Homan, and appreciated the opportunity to discuss the situation with him. Still, they seemed more reluctant to cooperate with ICE or otherwise change their policy than Homan had suggested in his press conference.

“I’m not sure I can do much more,” the governor told my colleague Isaac Stanley-Becker this week, accusing the federal agents of engaging in unconstitutional profiling. Speaking to the U.S. Conference of Mayors on Thursday, Frey described the Trump administration’s actions as “an invasion on our democracy” and reiterated his stance that the federal operation needs to end immediately.

Hours after Homan told reporters that Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison had “clarified” that county jails can tell the government when violent offenders are scheduled for release, Ellison released a lengthy statement asserting that his priority was bringing the federal surge to an end and investigating the deaths of Good and Pretti.

“We will not make any concessions or compromises to undermine our state sovereignty,” he wrote, adding that he “did not make, and could not have made, any agreement” with Homan about how county officials would interact with ICE.

The Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, home to the state’s largest jail system, has a policy of not honoring ICE detainer requests. When I asked if Sheriff Dawanna Witt planned to revise that stance after meeting with Homan this week, the HCSO spokesperson Megan Larson was noncommittal. Jails have limited discretion, she told me, and any changes “must come through clear statewide policy direction and legislation.”

In an advisory opinion last year, Ellison wrote that local jails cannot legally hold inmates in custody at ICE’s request if they are otherwise eligible for release. Ellison said this week that he told Homan he stands by that opinion. He said he also reiterated Minnesota state law, which requires state and local authorities to contact ICE whenever a noncitizen is convicted of a felony.

Linus Chan, a law professor at the University of Minnesota and an immigration attorney, told me that although he does not know of a time when the state has not complied with that law, DHS is asking for deeper cooperation that would allow its agents to search local jails and deport people who have not been convicted or who are eligible for bail. Agreeing to such a policy would be a major misread of what Minnesotans—many of whom have taken to the streets to protest ICE—expect from their leaders, local activists told me.

With Trump’s poll numbers sliding and infighting and dysfunction plaguing the team behind the mass-deportation plan, some Minnesota residents say cutting a deal now would amount to an ill-timed surrender. Others are concerned that despite Homan’s charm offensive and promises to turn down the temperature, federal authorities have continued to comb through Minneapolis looking for people to arrest.

“Given how violent things have been and how awful the situation has gotten, people are not going to just immediately want to turn around and trust anything that is said by the federal

government right now,” Julia Decker, the policy director for the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, told me.

The arrests of journalists and protesters this week by federal agents have further inflamed tensions. Meanwhile, local officials have been frustrated by DHS’s unwillingness to cooperate with their investigations into the shootings of Good and Pretti. (The Justice Department announced yesterday that it is opening an investigation into Pretti’s death.)

“The only time this situation will de-escalate is when the federal occupying force ends its siege,” Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty said this week in a video message. “They are the escalating factor, and they have been this entire time.”

Trump may have the final say on where the federal operation goes from here. A day after saying he planned to “de-escalate a little bit,” Trump on Wednesday attacked Frey for saying the city would not enforce federal immigration law. The mayor, the president posted on social media, was “playing with fire.”

And hours after Homan pledged a significant reduction of forces from Minneapolis if local leaders agreed to work with him, Trump appeared to cast doubt on the more cooperative approach. While attending a premiere for First Lady Melania Trump’s documentary film, the president was asked whether he was planning to pull back in Minnesota.

“No, no, not at all,” he said.

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