

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



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I was recently asked by a reporter if the job of Attorney General was all I thought it would be. My answer to him was 'it is all I thought it would be and more.'

I love Kentucky and I ran for this office because it is a position in which a person can truly make a difference. I also knew there would be challenges and a few surprises along the way; both of which have proven to be true.

The budget crisis in the Commonwealth has been painful for many state agencies, mine included. Since taking office, our budget has been cut nearly 20%, pushing us back to funding levels not seen since 1999. This has resulted in some difficult cuts, but, I am working every day to ensure that these cuts in no way affect our ability to enforce the law or to protect our citizens.

Despite the economic challenges, I am proud of our accomplishments. I am particularly gratified by our achievements in fighting cybercrime. Shortly after taking office, I fulfilled a campaign promise to create a cybercrimes unit that focuses solely on crimes that occur online or are committed by using new technology. We have since seized more than 7,000 child porn images and videos and are actively investigating nine child pornography cases. Cracking down on online predators who are trying to harm Kentucky children remains a top priority of mine.

In talking with law enforcement from across the state, it was clear that one of their top concerns was a lack of training and equipment to combat cybercrimes. Along with University of Louisville, we conducted four regional training seminars. Microsoft also selected my office as one of only nine agencies in the nation to host cybercrimes training and data-collection seminars. Approximately 400 police officers and prosecutors attended our training.

I am also pleased to report that the digital forensics lab we opened in the Office of the Attorney General has processed more than 100 hard drives and completed 41 forensics examinations.

Our new statewide partnership to increase cybersafety education for both adults and children is also making a difference. Unfortunately, far too many parents still have a false sense of security when it comes to the Internet. The statistics speak for themselves. One in seven youths ages 10-17 report receiving unwanted sexual advances online. Thirty percent involve attempts to make contact offline and only 25% of solicitations are reported to adults or law enforcement.

Through our statewide workshops, I've traveled to high schools and middle schools across the Commonwealth and alerted approximately 14,000 students to some of the dangers that exist in the virtual world. We also hosted a statewide conference for 350 parents and educators on how to be online models, mentors and monitors for their children as part of a new

three-year cybersafety initiative with Kentucky Child Now and the Kentucky Department of Education.

Although our cybersafety educational initiatives are important to protecting Kentucky families, we must bring Kentucky law up-to-date with the changes in technology. I am presenting legislation that would prohibit sex offenders from using social-networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, and create a searchable database of registered sex offender email addresses. I am also proposing that we criminalize the online distribution of live, sexually explicit images to minors over the Internet. I hope you will join me in calling your representatives and senators to support this legislation.

We have also made progress in our fight against drug abuse in the Commonwealth. Operation Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment and Education (Operation UNITE) recognized my office with the "Most Valuable Agency" award for our efforts in fighting illegal drugs, particularly prescription drugs. We currently have 240 active cases, 105 of which were opened this year.

This has been a busy year for our Consumer Protection Division. Our office obtained relief of more than \$4.5 million in loans for 2,200 students of the now defunct Decker College. The agreement cancelled some students' liability for loans due to the school's failure.

In our Medicaid Fraud and Elder Abuse Division, we have obtained \$23

million from civil settlements working with other Medicaid Fraud units from other states. We have also opened 84 criminal investigations that have resulted in 46 indictments for neglect or abuse.

We are also continuing to move forward with three gas price investigations. We issued civil subpoenas to refiners and suppliers of the Kentucky petroleum market and asked the Federal Trade Commission to review the merger of Marathon and Ashland Oil after we investigated a price spike in Louisville this summer. Our investigation continues into the more than 2,000 emails and phone calls we received reporting allegations of price-gouging in the wake of Hurricane Ike. Finally, this office is preparing to take the \$89 million price-gouging lawsuit filed against Marathon Petroleum and Speedway in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to trial in October 2009.

While there have been challenges during my first year, I truly believe these challenges have provided us the opportunity to reevaluate our priorities and form new partnerships to help protect Kentucky families. I hope we can work together in the coming year to keep moving Kentucky forward.

Jack Conway

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