

FORUM EDITORIAL: PURDON'S SERVICE EXEMPLARY

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When North Dakota's U.S. attorney exits his office Thursday, he will leave behind a record of exemplary service to North Dakota and the nation. Tim Purdon, who has been on the job since August 2010, announced a few weeks ago he was resigning the federal post to go into the private practice of law.

Purdon had a mission when he was named U.S. attorney for the District of North Dakota. Following unanimous confirmation by the U.S. Senate, he found himself in a position where he could make a difference in Indian country, and he went to work to do just that. He tasked himself and his staff with improving public safety on the state's reservations at a time when high-profile cases of horrific child abuse and child murder were coming to light. In collaboration with tribal leaders, federal law enforcement and state agencies, Purdon focused his attention and directed resources to the seemingly intractable problems on the reservations. The work has, indeed, made a difference.

Purdon also was among the strongest voices in addressing organized human trafficking and drug trafficking that took off as the state's western oil economy began to boom. Drugs and prostitution followed money into oil country. Purdon and others in law enforcement came together to confront the new threats. He was a leader in fostering collaboration and cooperation among all levels of government and law enforcement; and progress in shutting down trafficking has been made.

But as importantly, Purdon never hesitated to be candid and as transparent as possible about the changing nature of crime in North Dakota.

Within the constraints of his office, he warned that crime in the state had morphed from serious but manageable drug and other offenses into organized gang-type enterprises that were sophisticated, well-funded, well-armed, highly dangerous and moving in from out of state. His emphasis on the seriousness of the situation was among factors that convinced federal and state law enforcement, the state's congressional delegation and the Legislature to step up their game.

The U.S. attorney handles all sorts of federal crime in addition to headline-making drug and trafficking cases, often sorely testing limited resources. Purdon and his assistants measured up during his years at the helm. They have done a good job.

North Dakota is a safer place because of Purdon's work. The structures of comprehensive law enforcement have been strengthened to deal with new and chronic crime threats. It's a record of which he can be proud and North Dakotans can applaud.