



June 14, 2007

Representative John Conyers  
Chairman  
House Committee on the Judiciary  
2138 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Conyers:

In this country, where the rule of law is paramount, the top law enforcement official must set the example for legal and ethical behavior. The Department of Justice has a singular obligation to enforce the law without prejudice or partisan purpose. Unfortunately, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has demonstrated reckless disregard for the obligations of his office. Under his leadership, the Department of Justice has subverted the public interest for partisan political concerns.

The hard work of the House Judiciary Committee and its determined efforts to expose the truth have provided much of what we know about these troubling incidents at the Justice Department. Common Cause believes there is enough evidence to launch impeachment proceedings against Mr. Gonzales, and today we call on the Committee to take that step.

Since January the American public has learned that:

- Nine U.S. Attorneys were forced from their jobs without being told why, including some prosecutors who received favorable performance evaluations. It appears the prosecutors were fired for refusing to succumb to partisan political pressure.
- In response to Congressional inquiries, Mr. Gonzales and Justice Department officials have offered differing, and at times contradictory, explanations for the firings, at first saying that the prosecutors were fired for poor performance and that the White House had played only a minor role.

- Subsequent to their initial testimony, Justice Department officials switched stories, saying the fired prosecutors had received good performance evaluations, and that the White House had initiated the dismissals.
- When Mr. Gonzales testified before Congress about the dismissals, he said he was involved sporadically in the process, but had delegated much of the responsibility to staff. He said many times in his testimony that he could not recall specific details.
- A senior advisor to the Attorney General, Monica Goodling, acknowledged under oath that she “crossed the line” when she used political criteria in the selection of non-political positions within the Justice Department. On February 12, 2006, Ms. Goodling sent a spreadsheet of each U.S. Attorney’s political activities and memberships in conservative political groups to senior administration officials, with the comment, “this is the chart that the AG requested.”
- In addition, four members of Gonzales’ inner circle have resigned or have announced their intention to resign. The Justice Department’s Inspector General and Office of Professional Responsibility are investigating whether any laws were violated in the alleged politicized hiring of career prosecutors and immigration judges.

To date, the President and Attorney General Gonzales have refused to allow senior officials to testify under oath about any role they may have played in the firings or to provide important documentation on the issue. Mr. Gonzales has apparently used the Justice Department’s most sensitive law enforcement functions to advance partisan interests and undermine the integrity of the nation’s top law enforcement agency.

The congressional impeachment process is specifically designed to protect the public from misfeasance by public officials. Given the stonewalling and recalcitrance of the Administration over the Attorney General’s conduct, impeachment appears to be the only vehicle for vindicating the public’s interest in having an Attorney General who is free of conflicts of interest and who enforces the nation’s laws in a fair and nonpartisan manner.

This episode is a blow to the integrity and credibility of our criminal justice system. And it comes at a time of corrosive public cynicism and distrust of government that has been fueled by recent political scandals. A failure to investigate and disclose to the American people will only exacerbate those feelings.

Our Attorney General, and our U.S. Attorneys have a long history of non-partisanship and of enforcing the nation’s laws in a fair manner. That reputation has been tarnished and must be restored. Only through impeachment proceedings will the American public know the full truth about the role that the Attorney General and the White House played in this episode.

Common Cause does not make this call for impeachment casually, but believes no further options remain for obtaining the necessary evidence to evaluate the Attorney General's conduct. Common Cause therefore believes impeachment is the only remaining option to restoring the integrity of the Justice Department.

Sincerely,

Bob Edgar  
President and CEO