

New evidence shows Bush White House orchestrated purge of US attorneys

Tom Eley
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Karl Rove and other senior Bush White House officials orchestrated the firing of nine United States attorneys in 2006, recently disclosed congressional testimony and e-mail communications show.

Bush aides, including Rove, had long insisted it was the Justice Department that oversaw the nine dismissals, seven of which occurred on December 7, 2006, a month after Congressional elections delivered a lopsided defeat to the Republican Party due largely to popular opposition to the Iraq war.

The new evidence demonstrates that the firings were in fact organized from the White House, with Rove, Bush's top advisor, playing the critical role. It also proves what has long been suspected: that the dismissals were part of a broader campaign targeting Democratic candidates and pro-Democratic voter registration groups, an effort whose ultimate aim was to manipulate the electoral process.

The House Judiciary Committee turned the evidence over to federal prosecutor Nora Dannehy, herself a US attorney, who has been tasked with discovering whether or not Bush administration officials broke the law in the firings. It includes more than 700 pages of testimony gathered by the committee, which subpoenaed Rove and former White House Counsel Harriet Miers, subjecting both to questioning in June and July. The disclosures are the culmination of a two-year investigation by the committee, which was compelled to sue in order to gain access to White House communications in a bid to overcome the Bush administration's expansive claims of "executive privilege."

Committee transcripts reveal that Miers and Rove continued to stonewall the investigation, the two claiming hundreds of times that they have no recollection of the events or communications in question. However, the testimony may expose earlier efforts to block Dannehy's investigation, part of which will focus on whether or not

Bush administration officials obstructed the congressional investigation or perjured themselves.

Though the purged attorneys were Bush appointees and Republicans, the White House determined they were insufficiently loyal. It appears most were fired for pursuing corruption investigations of elected Republican officials, or else for failing to pursue with enough alacrity "voter fraud" and corruption investigations potentially damaging to Democrats.

"Voter fraud" is an allegation Republicans have used to stymie voter registration efforts and subtract from the rolls voters more likely to support Democrats—for example, students and working class minorities.

The purge of the US attorneys resulted in a political scandal and congressional hearings that ultimately led to the resignation of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and a number of high-ranking Justice Department personnel in September 2007. It also contributed to Rove's resignation.

Prior to the firings, the position of US attorney had been, by tradition, shielded from politically motivated dismissals, even though the attorneys are political appointments made by the president. There are 94 US attorneys. They typically serve out a four-year term, trying cases on behalf of the federal government in federal, district and appeals courts.

The new revelations substantiate earlier indications that the decision to fire US Attorney Bud Cummins of Arkansas was taken to make the position available for Rove's protégé Tim Griffin, and that the former Missouri US attorney, Todd Graves—even though a Bush supporter—was dismissed when Missouri Senator Kit Bond demanded his removal as part of a feud between Graves's brother, a Republican congressman from Missouri, and a Bond aide.

However, particularly illuminating is evidence related to the firing of the US attorney for New Mexico, David

Iglesias. White House communications make clear that Iglesias was not dismissed for substandard work, as Bush officials had claimed. Rather, Iglesias was targeted because he had resisted Republican pressure to mount corruption investigations against prominent state Democrats in an effort to assist former Representative Heather A. Wilson, who was in a tight reelection race.

In June 2005, Rove's top aide, Scott Jennings, wrote that Iglesias should be fired based on the complaints of New Mexico Republicans that the attorney had not done enough to investigate allegations of corruption among prominent state Democrats. "I would really like to move forward with getting rid of NM USATTY," Jennings wrote. Local Republicans "are really angry over his lack of action on voter fraud stuff. Iglesias has done nothing.... We are getting killed out there."

Among the New Mexico Republicans appealing to the Bush administration for action against Iglesias was then-Senator Pete V. Domenici. Domenici was later censured by the Senate over the matter.

In another e-mail, New Mexico Republican Allen Weh wrote to Rove and other White House officials asking that they fire Iglesias. "To be perfectly candid," Weh wrote, "he was 'missing in action' during the last election." Rove responded by ordering an aide to discuss with White House legal counsel the possibility of dismissing Iglesias. Weh is now running for New Mexico governor.

Miers, the former White House counsel and a Bush loyalist, revealed in a closed session before Congress last month that she and a "very agitated" Rove had conversed over Iglesias shortly before he was fired.

"It was clear to me that he felt like he has a serious problem and that he wanted something done about it," Miers said in recollecting her conversation with Rove.

Not only did the White House intervene to sack Iglesias based on the partisan complaints of New Mexico Republicans, it also covered up the political nature of its action. In February 2007, William Kelley of the White House counsel's office e-mailed a number of top administration officials in regard to the firing of Iglesias, advising them to refute that political calculation played a role in the firing. "They are planning to deny that the investigation in question played any role in DOJ's decision," he wrote, "and to deny that any Member contacted main Justice to complain about the conduct (or not) of any particular investigation."

In another e-mail, then-deputy White House press secretary Dana Perino warned that the dismissal of US attorneys in Arizona and California, who were carrying on

investigations of prominent Republican lawmakers, would be understood as politically motivated. "U.S. Attorney Paul Charlton of Arizona had been moving toward an indictment of then-Rep. Rick Renzi (R) in that state, while Carol Lam in San Diego had expanded her probe of Rep. Randall "Duke" Cunningham (R-Calif.) to include another Republican congressman from that state as well as former CIA operative Kyle 'Dusty' Foggo," the *Washington Post* notes. Both Cunningham and Foggo were later convicted.

Commenting on the new evidence, Iglesias said in an interview that the "amount of backstabbing and treachery involved is just breathtaking." He continued, "It's astounding that without reviewing the evidence or talking to the F.B.I. or anything, the White House would assume that these were provable cases and that I needed to file them for the political benefit of the party. That's not what U.S. attorneys do." Iglesias said it is now "crystal clear" he and other US attorneys were sacked for "purely political reasons."

For their part, Democrats have deliberately attempted to conceal the central political importance of the firings from the population. As one analyst put it, they "have muddled the discussion" by focusing on Rove and the clear instances of nepotism in the firings.

Most of the attorneys were sacked in retribution for their unwillingness to launch prosecutions designed to influence the outcome of elections by damaging political opponents and crippling voter registration groups, or for taking action against Republicans. As such, the firings represent another phase in the attack on the right to vote, which first came into the open in the elections of 2000, when the Supreme Court intervened to hand the election to George W. Bush by stopping vote counting in Florida.

The attack on the right to vote, in turn, arises under conditions in which the policies of the ruling elite—imperialist war abroad and social plunder at home—are increasingly incompatible with basic democratic forms of governance.



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