

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

This is in response to your letter to the Attorney General dated February 8, 2007. An identical response has been sent to the other signatories of that letter.

As an initial matter, the Department agrees with the principle you set forth in your letter that “[o]nce appointed, U.S. Attorneys, perhaps more than any other public servants, must be above politics and beyond reproach; they must be seen to enforce the rule of law without fear or favor.” That many U.S. Attorneys, appointed by Presidents of both parties, have had political experience prior to their appointment does not undermine that principle. Your letter, however, contains assumptions and assertions that are simply erroneous.

First, your letter truncates the actual quote of the Attorney General’s testimony at the Judiciary Committee hearing on January 18, 2007, and consequently, mischaracterizes the statement. In full, the Attorney General stated: “I think I would never, ever make a change in a United States attorney for political reasons or *if it would in any way jeopardize an ongoing serious investigation. I just would not do it*” (emphasis added). The Department of Justice rejects any suggestion that U.S. Attorneys were asked or encouraged to resign for the inappropriate “political reason” of interfering with any public corruption case or retaliating against a U.S. Attorney who oversaw such a case.

Second, your letter mischaracterizes the testimony of the Deputy Attorney General given at the hearing held on February 6, 2007. The Deputy Attorney General simply stated the Department’s view that asking U.S. Attorney Bud Cummins to resign so that Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Tim Griffin might have the opportunity to serve as U.S. Attorney is not an inappropriate “political reason.” This is so, the Deputy Attorney General testified, because, *inter alia*, Mr. Griffin is very well-qualified to serve as U.S. Attorney, and Mr. Cummins “may have already been thinking about leaving at some point anyway.”

Deleted: taken

Indeed, at the time Mr. Griffin was appointed interim U.S. Attorney in December 2006 he had far more federal prosecution experience (in the Criminal Division and in the U.S. Attorney’s office) than Mr. Cummins did at the time he was appointed U.S. Attorney in January 2002. Mr. Cummins himself credits Mr. Griffin with the establishment of that office’s successful gun crime prosecution initiative. And Mr.

Deleted: the

Griffin has substantial military prosecution experience that Mr. Cummins does not have. Those who know Mr. Griffin must concede that he brings a style of leadership and level of energy that could only enhance the success of a U.S. Attorney's office. Moreover, it was well-known, as early as December 2004, that Mr. Cummins intended to leave the office and seek employment in the private sector. See "The Insider Dec. 30," *Ark Times* (Dec. 30, 2004) ("Cummins, 45, said that, with four children to put through college someday, he'll likely begin exploring career options. It wouldn't be 'shocking,' he said, for there to be a change in his office before the end of Bush's second term."). Finally, the Deputy Attorney General did not state or imply that Mr. Griffin would be appointed as the U.S. Attorney without Senate confirmation. Such a statement would be inconsistent with the Department's stated position that we are committed to having a Senate-confirmed U.S. Attorney in all 94 federal districts.

Deleted: it would strive to have each vacancy filled by a Senate-confirmed U.S. Attorney.

Third, the Department does not consider the replacement of one Republican U.S. Attorney by another Republican lawyer who is well-qualified and has extensive experience as a prosecutor and strong ties to the district to be a change made for "political reasons." Mr. Cummins was confirmed to serve a four-year term, which expired on January 9, 2006. He served his entire term, plus an additional year. United States Attorneys serve at the pleasure of the President; that has always been the rule, and U.S. Attorneys accept their appointment with that understanding.

Deleted: As you know, U.S. Attorneys serve at the pleasure of the President. That has always been the rule and U.S. Attorneys accept their appointment with full understanding that they may serve the full term or in excess of the full term, but that at any time they could be removed by the President.

In answer to your specific questions:

Deleted: Regarding specific questions raised in your letter, we respond as follows:¶

- Although the decision to have Mr. Griffin replace Mr. Cummins was first contemplated in the spring or summer of 2006, the final decision to appoint Mr. Griffin to be interim U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Arkansas was made on or about December 15, 2006, the Attorney General had spoken with Senator Pryor.
- The Department of Justice is not aware of anyone lobbying for Mr. Griffin's appointment. Consistent with longstanding Administration practice, the decision regarding whether Mr. Griffin (who then was on active military duty) might be considered for appointment as U.S. Attorney upon his return from Iraq was discussed and made jointly by the Department of Justice and the White House.
- As the Deputy Attorney General testified, Mr. Cummins's continued service as U.S. Attorney was not considered at the same time as the other U.S. Attorneys that the Deputy Attorney General acknowledged were asked to resign for reasons related to their performance. As the Deputy Attorney General testified, the request that Mr. Cummins resign was "related to the opportunity to provide a fresh start with a new person in that position."
- The Department is not aware of Karl Rove playing any role in the decision to appoint Mr. Griffin.

Deleted: after a series of conversations between the Attorney General and Senator Pryor.

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: But, c

Deleted: in this Administration

Deleted: question of

Deleted: in Iraq

Deleted: addressed

Deleted: Mr. Cummins' continued service as U.S. Attorney was first considered after the Department learned of Mr. Cummins' stated interest in possibly resigning for a position in the private sector. As the Deputy Attorney General testified, this commenced well prior to considering the other U.S. Attorneys to resign for reasons related to their performance and was instead "related to the opportunity to provide a fresh start with a new person in that position." Also, a general matter, it is often preferable, to the extent practicable, to appoint a permanent replacement who has experience with and familiarity of the workings of the particular office, as Mr. Griffin did.

Deleted: ¶

Deleted: a

Deleted: as either on an interim or permanent basis

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to your inquiry.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Hertling
Acting Assistant Attorney General

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Arlen Specter