

June 21, 2007 - Political Appointees Undermined Civil Rights Division of DOJ

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, June 21, 2007
A Legacy of Cronyism:
Political Appointees Undermined
Civil Rights Division of DOJ

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today highlighted the latest in a long string of news reports concerning the cronyism and partisanship which dramatically altered the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ) during the Bush Administration.

"The systematic undermining of some of our government's most important federal agencies is one of the most dire legacies of the Bush Administration," Rep. Slaughter said.

"What has gone on in the Civil Rights Division of DOJ is a microcosm of a problem pervading all executive agencies from FEMA to FDA to the General Services Administration," Rep. Slaughter said. "Politics is trumping sound policy, because impartial, career officials have been replaced with partisan political appointees."

"The mission of our federal agencies is to execute laws that protect and serve all Americans, not to unilaterally impose the Administration's political agenda," Rep. Slaughter said. "The Bush Administration doesn't believe that simple truth, and the previous Congress ignored it. The new Congress has already begun to challenge the Administration's disregard for the integrity of our federal agencies, and will continue holding those responsible accountable until the impartiality and objectivity of our federal agencies is restored ."

As was reported in today's Washington Post, numerous current and former staffers in DOJ's Civil Rights Division have testified that Bradley Schlozman, the former deputy assistant attorney general for civil rights at DOJ, politicized hiring practices and replaced non-partisan, career attorneys with appointees likely to conform to a conservative political agenda.

Today's report comes on the same day that the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing today concerning oversight of the Civil Rights Division. The House Judiciary Committee also held a hearing concerning statements previously made by outgoing Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty concerning statements he previously made on the firings of eight U.S. attorneys earlier this year.

BACKGROUND: A LONG HISTORY OF ABUSE

Increasing attention has been paid to the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ, which during recent years experienced a dramatic shift in both its focus as an organization and the makeup of its staff.

As early as November of 2005, Dan Eggen of the Washington Post had written that:

"The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, which has enforced the nation's anti-discrimination laws for nearly half a century, is in the midst of an upheaval that has driven away dozens of veteran lawyers and has damaged morale for many of those who remain, according to former and current career employees."

Boston Globe reporter Charlie Savage has also followed the story of hiring practices at the Civil Rights Division. An article Mr. Savage published on July 23, 2006 ("Civil rights hiring shifted in Bush era") stated that "only 42 percent of the lawyers hired [to the division] since 2003, after the administration changed the rules to give political appointees more influence in the hiring process, have civil rights experience. In the two years before the change, 77 percent of those who were hired had civil rights backgrounds."

Connections to Monica Goodling and Bradley Schlozman

The politically-motivated hiring practices which are now being revealed were seemingly set in place by changes in DOJ policy that have been connected to both Monica Goodling and Mr. Schlozman.

An article from May 6th, 2007 by Mr. Savage ("Missouri attorney a focus in firings") noted that Mr. Schlozman:

"spent three years as a political appointee in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, where he supervised the voting rights section. There he came into conflict with veteran staff over his decisions to approve a Texas redistricting plan and a Georgia photo-ID voting law, both of which benefited Republicans. He also hired many new career lawyers with strong conservative credentials, in what critics say was an attempt to reduce enforcement of laws designed to eliminate obstacles to voting by minorities."

Similarly, an April 8th, 2007 article by Mr. Savage ("Scandal puts spotlight on Christian law school") focused on Ms. Goodling, highlighting the fact that she "was one of a handful of officials overseeing the firings" of eight U.S. Attorneys

earlier this year, even though she had "scant prosecutorial experience" and questionable "qualifications to evaluate the performance of U.S. attorneys..."

The article also noted that Ms. Goodling was a graduate of the Regent University School of Law. Regent was founded by Pat Robertson and has in recent years witnessed a vast increase in the number of its graduates appointed to federal government positions, including many who now work at the Department of Justice.

A Change in Focus for the DOJ

Many recent reports have also noted what has been a shift in the focus of the Civil Rights Division during recent years:

- An April, 2007 article by McClatchy journalist Greg Gordon noted that "For six years, the Bush administration, aided by Justice Department political appointees, has pursued an aggressive legal effort to restrict voter turnout in key battleground states in ways that favor Republican political candidates."

- A June 14th article in the New York Times commented that, "In recent years, the Bush administration has recast the federal government's role in civil rights by aggressively pursuing religion-oriented cases while significantly diminishing its involvement in the traditional area of race."

- Similarly, another piece by Mr. Gordon, published on June 19th, stated that "A former Justice Department political

appointee blocked career lawyers from filing at least three lawsuits charging local and county governments with violating the voting rights of African-Americans and other minorities, seven former senior department employees charged Monday."

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