

A lack of political will

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Doubtless, more than 60 U.S. senators lack confidence in Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, particularly after his testimony before the Judiciary Committee, where he displayed colossal ineptness, either feigned or real. Yet just 53 senators acted to put their feelings on the record Monday - short of the 60 needed. For shame.

A vote of no confidence would not have a direct impact on Gonzales' tenure. But it would have sent President Bush a message he needs to hear: The nation's top law officer isn't close to meeting standards.

Bush, who tends to value loyalty over competence, has refused to fire Gonzales even though, to hear the attorney general tell it, he was out of the loop on key decisions the Justice Department made.

A defiant Bush said: "They can have their votes of no confidence, but it's not going to make the determination about who serves in my government."

"My government"? As if the federal government was Bush's personal fiefdom. In truth, it's the people's government. And for the time being, the people have entrusted to Bush the executive branch, which they expect him to run for the public good. That means putting competent individuals in key posts.

Gonzales has declined to give straight answers on the firing of nine U.S. attorneys, all Bush appointees, whose failings appear to have been that they did not toe the Republican Party line as much as some partisans wanted.

Senate Minority Whip Trent Lott, R-Miss., termed the no-confidence resolution partisan. Yes, all the Democrats on hand backed the resolution in the 53-38 vote. But the measure was an attempt at a mild legislative check on a misbehaving executive branch - which seven Republicans agreed with in breaking with their party to vote with the Democrats. It was Lott and his party who played politics.

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