

In shambles

by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*

With the Senate's "no confidence" resolution failing on procedural grounds, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales may feel he now can put his deeply flawed record behind him and move on. Regrettably for the Justice Department, which has seen its reputation for nonpartisan stewardship shattered under Gonzales, there is nothing the attorney general can do to escape the taint he himself has created. But don't expect either Gonzales or President Bush to recognize this reality. Attempting to dismiss the rare Senate proceedings, the attorney general spent Monday at a conference in Miami, declaring: "I'm not focusing on what the Senate is doing." From Bulgaria, President Bush similarly spurned the Senate resolution as "meaningless" and making no difference whatsoever in "the determination about who serves in my government."

So, Gonzales likely will run out the next 18 months as one of the least effective attorneys general ever. And the president likely will stand behind Gonzales regardless of his failings and the damage he does to the American justice system. In the end, the history of the Bush administration will be marred by the abuses that fueled the Senate's "no confidence" vote.

David Iglesias, one of eight U.S. attorneys fired by Gonzales for largely political reasons, echoed the overwhelming consensus in a meeting Monday with the San Diego Union-Tribune editorial board: "He's in charge of a crippled department (which) is dysfunctional now." San Diego U.S. Attorney Carol Lam also was ousted, in a case that "stinks to high heaven," Iglesias said.

The procedural motion to end debate and vote on the resolution attracted a majority of senators, 53, but fell short of the 60 required under the Senate's rules to cut off a filibuster. Significantly, seven Republican senators joined Democrats in voting against Gonzales, despite heavy pressure from the White House to back the attorney general.

It is hardly "meaningless" when the senior GOP senator on the Judiciary Committee, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, condemns the attorney general's record. "There is no doubt in my mind that there is no confidence residing in Attorney General Gonzales," said Specter. He accurately described the Justice Department as "in shambles."

In fact, throughout the Senate's deliberations it was hard to find any senator who would defend Gonzales' record. Republicans decried the "no confidence" vote as politically motivated, as indeed it was, but virtually no one, Republican or Democrat, praised Gonzales.

An effective attorney general is essential on a range of critical issues - from achieving immigration reform to prosecuting terrorists. But the president appears stubbornly content to complete the remainder of his tenure with a crippled AG. Is it any wonder so many Americans are eager to move on to a new administration?

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