

Repairing the damage at Justice

The attorney general of the United States and the Justice Department are supposed to protect the rule of law. Unfortunately, under former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the department failed to meet that obligation. Instead, Justice became politicized, basing decisions on partisan pressure rather than on evidence and the law. That summarizes the conclusion of a 392-page report by the Office of Inspector General and Office of Professional Responsibility, "An Investigation into the Removal of Nine U.S. Attorneys in 2006." The report offers a depressing catalog of the destruction of this key department under Gonzales.

Normally, U.S. attorneys are removed only for misconduct or gross incompetence – or during a change of presidential administration. Never before have U.S. attorneys been removed en masse midterm.

The most egregious example was in New Mexico, where Republican Party activists and members of Congress complained to the White House that the U.S. attorney had declined to pursue voter fraud and corruption cases before key elections.

NATIONAL VIEW | ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Carbon emissions out of hand

At this point, the global climate is about as responsive to human input as a fully loaded supertanker. It will take a great distance – and a very long time – to change direction.

Right now, that supertanker is headed in the wrong direction, and it is picking up speed.

A new scientific report finds that since 2000, greenhouse gas emissions have increased four times faster than they did in the 1990s. They increased by about 3 percent last year as China overtook the United States as the leading carbon-dioxide emitter.

It's now likely that the Earth's atmosphere contains more carbon dioxide than at any other time in the last 650,000 years. It is 37 percent higher than it was before the Industrial Revolution began around 1750.

Carbon dioxide emissions are growing even faster than the worst-case scenarios put forward by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is the U.N.-sponsored organization established to track and study climate change. And emissions are expected to continue increasing for years to come, despite international efforts to cap them.

Emissions are only part of the problem. In the past, the world's oceans, jungles and forests acted as so-called carbon sinks, absorbing as much as half of the carbon dioxide released by the burning of fossil fuels.

But Brazilian government officials said this week that the Amazon rain forest is being deforested twice as fast as it was last year, reversing what had been a welcome slowing of the rate. Meanwhile, changes in ocean temperature, salinity and currents – some of which are related to global warming – are reducing the oceans' ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. That's making an already bad situation worse.

Scientists say it already is too late to prevent some

The report describes these as possible attempts by Republican political officials "who had a political interest in the outcome" to influence prosecutions in a battleground state or to affect the timing of public corruption cases against prominent Democrats to influence the outcome of an election.

This is serious stuff. If people believe that decisions to pursue particular cases are based on political considerations, then, in the words of the report, "respect for the Department of Justice's independence and integrity will be severely damaged and every U.S. attorney's prosecutorial decisions will be suspect."

Investigators couldn't get evidence because White House and some congressional officials wouldn't cooperate. Investigators recommended that the current attorney general name a special prosecutor, since "serious allegations involving potential criminal conduct have not been fully investigated or resolved."

Attorney General Michael Mukasey has appointed a special prosecutor, who will be able to subpoena witnesses, something the inspector general couldn't do. Mukasey has instructed the special prosecutor to report back in 60 days.

global warming. The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere guarantees that temperatures will continue to rise for years. Research published last month concluded that even if humans stopped releasing all greenhouse gases immediately, the world's average temperature probably would increase by more than 4 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century.

The U.N. climate change panel has estimated that temperature increases of between 3.2 and 9.7 degrees could trigger potentially catastrophic environmental changes that include the melting of glaciers and ice sheets around the globe.

Those, however, are projections – predictions about the future. The new scientific report, prepared by the Global Carbon Project, is a measure of what already has happened.

It's long, long past time for the United States to demonstrate some leadership on global climate change. Even though we're no longer the planet's biggest greenhouse gas emitter, we're still responsible for the lion's share of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The Bush administration, which so often has been wrong about global warming, is correct to insist that both developing and developed nations play a role in curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

But the United States also should make forest protection a part of any international global warming agreement. The world can't afford to lose any more of its natural carbon sinks.

Congress should act quickly to cap greenhouse gas emissions. And it must continue to invest in the development of alternative energy technologies and use the persuasive power of tax credits to encourage their adoption.

The longer we wait to set a new course, the longer it will take to change direction. And the closer we'll come to disaster.

ARTIST'S VIEW



GUEST COMMENTARY | ERIC MASSA

The way forward

Since the first day that I became a candidate for public office, I have described myself as a Roosevelt Democrat. In fact, I wear an original 1932 FDR campaign pin right below the American flag on my lapel. It was given to me by an elderly supporter who said wearing it would remind me to "stick by my guns" when times got tough.

Like President Hoover, President Bush has now taken us into an ever deepening economic calamity. Like the election of 1932, we can only solve our problems by moving this nation in a new direction. The issues are simply too big to trust to those that went along with the Bush Administration and allowed this crisis to occur on their watches.

When FDR was first elected, he brought with him 165 new members of Congress who went to work to create the New Deal. Roosevelt's administration put America back to work. In fact, the New Deal completed the Hoover Dam and countless other infrastructure projects all over America. The Arsenal of Democracy produced the "Two Ocean Navy," including the USS NEW JERSEY that I had the honor of serving on years later. The Civilian Conservation Corps built the National Park system and the Tennessee Valley Authority,

bringing electricity where it was previously unavailable. Most importantly the National Recovery Administration provided a non-partisan framework to distribute emergency federal funding to ensure that people got back to work with living wage jobs rebuilding America. If we have the political will, just like FDR, we can fix this problem.

The Bush rescue plan failed because partisan ideology kept members of Congress from working together to fix the flaws in the plan. It failed because partisan ideology prevented them from mustering the courage to vote for what many thought was unpopular. Now that the stock market has sharply fallen and tens of millions of Americans have seen their retirement accounts shrink, can we not agree that leadership means removing personal ideology from the equation and finding a workable solution?

The reality is that some still cling to the catch phrase "let the markets prevail." The fact is all the tired arguments against sensible government regulation, arguments that allowed the Great Depression to emerge and endure, have been trotted out over these past few years – and look where they have brought us, to a newly emerging financial meltdown.

The answer lies in the FDR vision of a non-partisan National Recovery Administration. I opposed the rescue bill because I know that the Secretary of the Treasury – who earned tens of millions at Goldman Sachs – could not and would not be able to rescue us from the very mistakes he and his aristocratic friends created. FDR was not right because he was a Democrat; he was right because he put the needs of the country before his partisan beliefs.

Most of the reasonable objections to the Bush financial plan could have been worked out because they were structural, not partisan. The Secretary of the Treasury isn't elected by the people. No one cabinet officer should be given that much power.

Today in Washington, making the right decision takes a back seat to greed and fierce ideology, which in turn creates road blocks, obstacles and a paralyzing inability to craft what's desperately needed in this critical moment: a practical solution.

We cannot allow this to continue. It is time for a change in Washington. It's time to take this nation in a new direction.

■ Eric Massa is the Democratic candidate for the 29th Congressional District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gil Sweet, great for the job

TO THE EDITOR | Having known Gil Sweet for many years, I must say that I was not surprised to see him

resurface in yet another ambition – an ambition that is consistent with his warm-heartedness and sense of justice preceeded by a lifetime of accomplishments in the human service arena. I am sure that he

would be a town justice exemplar for South Corning and will be up to speed very quickly.

Lee Kosow
Corning

LETTERS POLICY | THE LEADER

The Leader encourages members of the community to tell us their thoughts on issues of public importance.

- Letters should be typed or neatly printed.
- Letters must be kept to a maximum of 250 words. Letters longer than that will not be considered.
- Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. No letters will be published unless verified with the author in person or by telephone.

- Letters may be edited for space considerations.
 - The publication of any letter is at the discretion of the editor.
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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PO BOX 1017
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- Letters also may be dropped off at our office:
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BLOG TALK

Blog Talk contains excerpts from comments made on stories that appeared on www.the-leader.com. This week, comments included objections by state Senate candidate John Tonello to Corning receiving a state grant, a proposal to merge Corning-Painted Post sports teams and the first House vote on the bailout bill.

Tonello

gillet wrote on Thursday: "Tonello is jealous. Why does he want the taxpayers in Corning to pay for a state mandate?"

Bailey blogged on Thursday: "Well one doesnt need be a Political Science Major to see the timing."

polite posted on Thursday: "The last mayor forgot too thank Winner for the movie theater grant. Reed has good manners. Please and Thank you go a long ways. Maybe Tonello should try it."

Merging Teams

4BetterSchools wrote on Thursday: "...The analysis is simple.....with 2 teams, 2x as many kids play. Combine teams where participation is low (ex: JV girls lacrosse). What price you are willing to pay for kids to play sports.....that is what it boils down to."

35ball7 posted on Thursday: "In my opinion this is a great idea. As an alumni, teacher, parent and former coach is the CPP district I have thought for many years that this needed to be considered. The teams that my kids have tried out for many times have no cuts at all and coaches are actually begging for players..."

Corning2124 wrote on Thursday: "Hurrah for not a new idea but a revitalized great idea! Had this been implemented eight years ago, Option 2 would have passed by a landslide instead just a simple majority. We also could have sent our special interest school board members packing after they went against what the majority of tax payers approved! Not to mention our children would already be graduating from newer better equipped schools with expanded facilities..."

Jack Black posted on Friday: "The past rivalries between East and West have, for the most part, been healthy and fun...that will all change if this plan is invoked...morale and self confidence will take a major hit...You really need to think this through folks because you may be headed down a road that has no where to turn around."

House Bailout

catiline wrote on Tuesday: "...As for Randy, hes like a rat deserting a sinking ship. He's voted with Bush 93% of the time and during the commander and chimps total term and 100 percent his first six years in office. He's the ultimate rubber stamp. A few examples; he voted w/ Bush against SCHIP, the College Cost Reduction Act, Responsible Redeployment from Iraq Act, Stem Cell Research and many, many other bills. Now in an election year he wants to portray himself as a man of the people..."

FYI posted on Tuesday: "The current crisis we are in on wall street is based on the housing and mortgage industry greed that was started by the beloved Jimmy Carter and has blossomed under Sick Willy and is now coming to fruition..."

5thwardbrat wrote on Thursday: "I think people are going to be shocked at how good a president GW has actually been. Sick Willy left him with a helluva mess and he's been cleaning it up rather well. I don't foresee Obama doing as well. McCain probably can, he can look at situations and react in a practical logical manner rather than knee jerk like Obama..."