

STILL INVESTIGATING CRIMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE USA PURGE

Via Marty Lederman, an update on the investigation(s) into the USA Purge.

But recent behind-the-scenes activity in several investigations suggests that the issue that roiled Congress in 2007 could re-emerge in the heat of the election year. Two inquiries by the House and Senate ethics committees are examining whether several congressional Republicans, including one running for the Senate this year, improperly interfered with investigations.

As potent as the congressional probes might be, they appear to be far narrower than a sprawling inquiry launched by the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR).

Investigators from these offices have been questioning whether senior officials lied to Congress, violated the criminal provisions in the Hatch Act, tampered with witnesses preparing to testify to Congress, obstructed justice, took improper political considerations into account during the hiring and firing of U.S. attorneys and created widespread problems in the department's Civil Rights Division, according to several people familiar with the investigation.

It is mostly just a review. The two most interesting details I found were, firstly, the news that the House and Senate Ethics Committees were still pursuing this. That suggests that—as we suspected—Pete Domenici may well be leaving the Senate because he knows he broke the law

when he tried to get David Iglesias fired for not indicting Democrats according to the election schedule. It also means Representative Heather Wilson will have some challenges as she runs for the Senate this year (the House inquiry will predictably lead nowhere, but if this report comes out before the election...).

The other interesting detail is a partial list of those whom the OIG/OPR investigation have interviewed (including David Iglesias' wife):

Following the Senate ethics committee visit to Albuquerque last month, Justice Department investigators interviewed Iglesias's former staff, according to a well-placed source.

Justice Department investigators also interviewed Allen Weh, chairman of the New Mexico Republican Party, last year.

Weh reportedly complained about Iglesias in 2005 to Karl Rove, who was then White House deputy chief of staff.

Weh said last week that his interview with the investigators was brief, and he didn't expect inquiries to amount to anything significant. "People don't care about this; this is yesterday," Weh said.

These two details—that the investigators interviewed Weh and Iglesias' former staffers—are important. Weh was in the press early claiming he had been pushing Rove to fire Iglesias back in 2005, much earlier than the DOJ documents suggested Iglesias had been targeted. But it now appears Weh's comments were part of a cover-up, an attempt to draw attention away from the later period, in which Bush was personally involved in Iglesias' targeting. No wonder Weh wants you to believe that "this is yesterday."

By interviewing Iglesias' former staff, investigators will also be able to pinpoint when the "absentee landlord" claims began—and show

that that, too, was just a cover story to hide the actual events that implicate Bush.

The article suggests we may get "a scathing report within the next three months," though we were waiting for a report last fall. Let's hope the three months estimate is more real than the last one.