

THEY'RE CLOSE TO DOMENICI ... ARE THEY CLOSE TO BUSH?

Murray delivers the news he promised the other day, revealing that the grand jury investigating the US Attorney firings is getting closer to Pete Domenici.

A federal grand jury probe of the firings of nine U.S. attorneys during the Bush administration is focusing on the role played by recently retired Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM) and former senior Bush White House aides in the 2006 dismissal of David Iglesias as U.S. attorney for New Mexico, according to legal sources familiar with the inquiry.

The federal grand jury is investigating whether Domenici and other political figures attempted to improperly press Iglesias to bring a criminal prosecution against New Mexico Democrats just prior to the 2006 congressional midterm elections, according to legal sources close to the investigation and private attorneys representing officials who prosecutors want to question.

Investigators appear to be scrutinizing Iglesias' firing in the context of whether he was fired in retaliation because Domenici and others believed that he would not manipulate the timing of prosecutions to help Republicans.

Apparently, Murray's inquiries to both Domenici and his aide involved in Iglesias' firing did not reveal whether or not Domenici will now cooperate with the investigation (he refused to cooperate with DOJ's own investigation).

Blalack, a partner with the law firm of O'Melveny and Myers, who is representing Domenici in his dealings with the

Justice Department, declined to discuss anything related to the matter, including whether his client will cooperate with prosecutors conducting the current federal grand jury probe.

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Michael Madigan, an attorney representing [Domenici Chief of Staff Steve] Bell, did not respond to several telephone and email requests for a comment for this story.

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Although Domenici has refused to be interviewed by the Justice Department, and also declined to comment for this story, he said in a statement in March 2007 that "in retrospect I regret making that call and apologize" and that he had "never pressured [Iglesias] or threatened him in any way."

It'll be interesting to see whether Domenici cooperates. That's because—according to an often-ignored story from the Albuquerque Journal—Domenici had to call Bush directly to get Iglesias fired.

In the spring of 2006, Domenici told Gonzales he wanted Iglesias out.

Gonzales refused. He told Domenici he would fire Iglesias only on orders from the president.

At some point after the election last Nov. 6, Domenici called Bush's senior political adviser, Karl Rove, and told him he wanted Iglesias out and asked Rove to take his request directly to the president.

Domenici and Bush subsequently had a telephone conversation about the issue.

The conversation between Bush and

Domenici occurred sometime after the election but before the firings of Iglesias and six other U.S. attorneys were announced on Dec. 7.

Iglesias' name first showed up on a Nov. 15 list of federal prosecutors who would be asked to resign. It was not on a similar list prepared in October.

The Journal confirmed the sequence of events through a variety of sources familiar with the firing of Iglesias, including sources close to Domenici. The senator's office declined comment.

All the people who have refused to cooperate thus far—Domenici, Bell, Rove, and probably Deputy White House Counsel William Kelley—are the ones who could confirm or deny the ABQ Journal story.

Would the 77-year old former Senator be willing to take the fall to protect Bush?

Depending on how aggressive Dannehy is, we might get to find out.