

JC Watts column
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I just found this anecdote online, and thought you may enjoy it:

At the height of a political corruption trial, the prosecuting attorney attacked a witness. "Isn't it true," he bellowed, "that you accepted five thousand dollars to compromise this case?"

The witness stared out the window, as though he hadn't heard the question.

"Isn't it true that you accepted five thousand dollars to compromise this case?" the lawyer repeated.

The witness still did not respond.

Finally, the judge leaned over and said, "Sir, please answer the question."

"Oh," the startled witness said, "I thought he was talking to you!"

The legal profession is an easy target for jokes today, and I'm not saying they're all on the take, but watching the machinations in the Department of Justice gives me pause as to the loyalties of some of our highest public servants.

Over the last 20 years of my life, I've decided that one should never put one's fate or welfare in the hands of an attorney or a judge who takes a campaign contribution or is appointed by someone who did. The current hoopla over the Bush administration's abrupt dismissal of eight US Attorneys has brought this conviction back to the forefront of my conscious.

We should never reach the conclusion that it's appropriate to play politics with justice. As we've seen with the dismissal of those US Attorneys unfolding before us over the last month or so, it's been quite interesting listening to arguments on both sides why it's right or why it's wrong.

For the record, I think these eight public servants were wronged by their own administration, and I am bothered by what both sides are saying concerning the dismissals.

Supporters of the Administration are claiming these federal prosecutors were not aggressive enough in carrying out the president's policies. They further claim precedence in their actions, as every US Attorney serves at the pleasure of the President. Indeed, President Clinton asked for and received the resignations of most or all of the 93 US Attorneys upon his taking office in 1993, as did President Reagan in 1981, and President Carter in 1977, and every president in memory.

While a president has every right to replace a US Attorney, this mini-scandal confirms to us that Republicans and Democrats replace US Attorneys because they believe that person will be more favorable to their policies or politics.

And while I understand what the defenders are saying, administration policies have to harmonize with the law. It is the responsibility of each US Attorney to determine if law has been followed, not if it's an administration agenda item. They ultimately report to law, not political agenda.

"But every President does it!" is not a good argument. It's just an argument that points to the fact that often, an appointed official may be expected to stand with his sponsor – not the law.

If a US Attorney or judge is to uphold the law and the Constitution of the United States "so help me God," it should not matter who is on the bench or who is approaching the bench. Yet it does matter, because presidents come into office thinking every US Attorney should be loyal to him.

We as citizens of the United States like to believe we have a great judicial system. I don't share that zeal, and I'm not sure most Americans trust the system at this point. And when these types of things happen, it lessens our confidence in the judicial system even more.

Attorney General Gonzales will not survive this ordeal, and he shouldn't. With his predilection for loyalty – almost to a fault -- I don't think the President will ask for his resignation, but Gonzales should and will eventually resign. It's the great Catch-22 of loyalty. Bush's loyalty to Gonzales should be awarded by Gonzales' resignation – out of loyalty to President Bush.

Some reading this column may wonder why Gonzales should resign, when President Clinton did many of the same things, often to a more brazen degree. My response is simple.

Right is right, and right should prevail – not precedence. At some point we need to step up and defend a better system and a higher standard than the current "they did it first" policy. That sounds like something from the elementary school playground, not the highest offices in the land.

What kind of government do we deserve? One that rises above arrogance and incompetence.

It's never appropriate to play politics with justice.