



36 Senators, Including Senator Feinstein, Urge Gonzales To Appoint Special Counsel To Lead Abramoff Scandal Case
February 2, 2006

Washington, DC -- U.S. Senators Harry Reid, Charles E. Schumer, Dianne Feinstein, and others sent a letter signed by a majority of Democrats to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales asking him to appoint a special counsel to continue the investigation into and prosecution of the Jack Abramoff corruption scandal.

The text of the letter is below:

February 2, 2006

*The Honorable Alberto Gonzales
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20530*

Dear General Gonzales:

We write to join the request made last week that you appoint a special counsel to continue the investigation and the prosecution of those involved in the corruption scandal surrounding Jack Abramoff's dealings with the federal government. The Department's response to the press regarding that request did not address the fundamental issue of a conflict of interest or the other serious issues raised by the letter.

This scandal has shaken the public's confidence in our government and all involved must be pursued vigorously. A special counsel will ensure the public's confidence in the investigation and prosecution and help to restore its faith in our government. FBI officials have said the Abramoff investigation "involves systemic corruption within the highest levels of government." Such an assertion indicates extraordinary circumstances and it is in the public interest that you act under your existing statutory authority to appoint a special counsel.

Mr. Abramoff's significant ties to Republican leadership in Congress, and allegations of improper activity involving Administration officials, reaching, possibly, into the White House itself, pose a possible conflict of interest for the Department and thus further warrant the appointment of a special counsel. Recent news reports confirm that Mr. Abramoff met the President on several occasions and during some of those meetings, Mr. Abramoff and his family had their photos taken with the President. Mr. Abramoff also organized at least one and possibly several meetings with White House staff for his clients. These meetings with the President and White House staff occurred while you were serving as White House Counsel.

Given the possible ties between Mr. Abramoff and senior government officials, we believe the appointment of a special counsel is not only justified, but necessary.

The Public Integrity section of the Department has thus far pursued this case appropriately, and we applaud its pursuit of Mr. Abramoff and his colleagues. As the investigation turns to government officials and their staffs, both in the Executive and Legislative branches, we have no doubt that if the investigation is left to the career prosecutors in that section, the case would reach its appropriate conclusion. Unfortunately, the highly political context of the allegations and charges may lead some to surmise that political influence may compromise the investigation. This concern is heightened by allegations that Frederick Black, the former acting U.S. Attorney for Guam and the Northern Marianas, was replaced, perhaps improperly, as a result of his investigation of Mr. Abramoff.

Appointment of a Special Counsel at this point in time is made even more appropriate by the White House's recent nomination of Noel Hillman, the career prosecutor in charge of the case, to a federal judgeship. As a new prosecutor will need to take over the case, we ask you to appoint an outside Special Counsel so the public can be assured no political considerations will be a part of this investigation or the subsequent prosecutions.

Because this investigation is vital to restoring the public's faith in its government, any appearance of bias, special favor or political consideration would be a further blow to our democracy. Appointment of a special counsel would ensure that the investigation and prosecution will proceed without fear or favor and provide the public with full confidence that no one in this country is above the law.

We know you share our commitment to restoring the public's trust in our government. We hope you will take the only appropriate action here and appoint a special counsel so we can ensure that justice is done while preserving the integrity of the Justice Department.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter soon.

Harry Reid	Tim Johnson
Charles E. Schumer	Paul Sarbanes
Ken Salazar	Tom Carper
Barack Obama	Jeff Bingaman
Dick Durbin	John F. Kerry
Robert Menendez	Bill Nelson
Ted Kennedy	Frank R. Lautenberg
Daniel K. Inouye	Barbara Mikulski
Blanche L. Lincoln	Dianne Feinstein
Kent Conrad	Patty Murray
Jack Reed	Daniel K. Akaka
Evan Bayh	Maria Cantwell
Carl Levin	Hillary Rodham Clinton
Joe Lieberman	Ron Wyden
Debbie Stabenow	Barbara Boxer
Chris Dodd	Jim Jeffords
Patrick Leahy	Max Baucus
Russell D. Feingold	Joe Biden