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NEWS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER



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RENO'S "MARCH MASSACRE"

DOLE BLASTS CLINTON'S DISMISSAL OF US ATTORNEYS: DEPARTMENT'S LEADERSHIP IN QUESTION AS JUSTICE TAKES BACK SEAT TO POLITICS

Nearly twenty years ago, when Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and Attorney General Eliot Richardson were fired from their posts, the press railed about the so-called "Saturday-night massacre."

Yesterday, we witnessed the "March massacre," as Attorney General Janet Reno--in an unprecedented house-cleaning--gave all 93 U.S. Attorneys their walking papers.

Justice is not a factory good that can be mass produced with the turn of a switch.

Rendering justice requires people, and the considered judgements of those with experience and some expertise.

With yesterday's announcement, one wonders whether there is anyone at Justice who fits this bill.

No Deputy Attorney General has been nominated.

There are no Assistant Attorneys General heading the Criminal, Civil, Tax, Antitrust, and Civil Rights divisions.

We don't have a Solicitor General.

And now all 93 U.S. Attorneys have been given their pink slips.

Bad Timing

President Clinton certainly has the right to select his own U.S. Attorneys, as do all presidents. But that's not the point.

The point is that firing all 93 U.S. Attorneys, at a time when the Justice Department is woefully lacking in leadership, is bad-timing--pure and simple.

No matter how you look at it, the firing of each and every U.S. Attorney will disrupt ongoing investigations and prosecutions.

Judicial Logjam

It will lower morale. And with the top posts in Washington unfilled and a Supreme Court nomination on the horizon, it's anybody's guess when new U.S. Attorneys will be confirmed and on the job.

Obviously, politics had a big role to play here.

But the bottom line is this: the President's political--and yes, impatient--desire to select his own U.S. attorneys will force much of the Department's important work to come to a screeching halt.

Justice will suffer.

Who's Calling Shots?

Who's calling the shots on Constitution Avenue anyway?

Is it Janet Reno, who says that dismissing the U.S. Attorneys was a "joint decision" with the White House? Is it the White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum? Or is it a gentleman named Webster Hubbell, an old friend of the President, who roams the halls of Justice as the official White House liaison officer?

Earlier this month, when I voted to confirm Ms. Reno, I commended her for her law enforcement background and for her poise, but I also said that I would be watching her performance closely.

I am watching, and so far, I am not impressed.

For those of us interested in a Justice Department where political considerations take a back seat--an interest the Attorney General herself claims to share--the March massacre is a big disappointment.