

KEN SALAZAR
COLORADO



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20510 - 3903

June 26, 2008

Attorney General Michael Mukasey
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Mukasey:

I am deeply troubled by the findings in the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) and Office of Professional Responsibility's (OPR) joint report, "An Investigation of Allegations of Politicized Hiring in the Department of Justice Honors Program and Summer Law Intern Program," issued on June 24, 2008.

The Attorney General's Honors Program and the Summer Law Intern Program traditionally recruit some of the best legal minds in the country. Applicants include recent law school graduates and students who have excelled academically and who actively participate in their community by joining or volunteering with student and national organizations or working for their elected officials. However, the OIG/OPR report shows that many highly-qualified candidates were rejected simply because of their ideological and political affiliations.

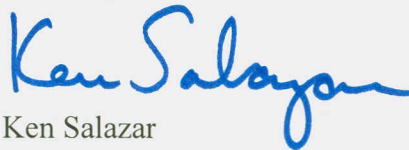
As the Colorado Attorney General from 1999-2004, I understand how important it is to remain nonpartisan in order to effectively carry out the Department of Justice. The findings in the OIG/OPR report are disgraceful. The Department of Justice exists "to enforce the law and defend the interests of the United States according to the law...and to ensure fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans." The actions by political appointees of the Department were committed in violation of the Department's policy on nondiscrimination and the Civil Service Reform Act, which prohibits the Department from discriminating in hiring of career positions on the basis of political affiliation.

Trust in the Department is at an all-time low given high-profile memos enabling torture and the controversy surrounding the firing of nine U.S. attorneys. The OPR/OIG report is yet another stain on the Department's reputation, and, sadly, it may only be the beginning. I am concerned that the upcoming OIG/OPR report investigating allegations involving the Civil Rights Division will contain similar findings.

It is critical that you actively work to restore the Department's reputation by guaranteeing to the public that Department policies and federal nondiscrimination laws are being followed. It is also important that you restore the reputation of the U.S. attorney system by ensuring that its apolitical, highly-competent nature is restored.

I urge you to immediately adopt the recommendations outlined in the OIG/OPR report as official policies of the Department. There is a meaningful difference between requiring Department officials to simply read about merit-based criteria and requiring them to formally acknowledge that they have read and understand the rules stating that political or ideological factors cannot be used in hiring decisions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ken Salazar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Ken" and "Salazar" being capitalized and prominent.

Ken Salazar
United States Senator