

Clean House at Justice Now

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Body

The Aug. 14 editorial "Justice at Justice" failed to grasp the consequences of politicized hiring decisions at the Justice Department. The fallout from less qualified judges and lawyers enforcing the law is tantamount to a denial of justice, so we need to root out bad hires now. Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey is satisfied to let the personnel evaluation process weed out the incompetent over time.

In the meantime, roughly 40 immigration judges awarded positions based on partisan interest, not experience or merit, will make decisions that carry serious and sometimes life-threatening consequences for those seeking relief from deportation.

Most people facing deportation are not represented by lawyers; there is no right to counsel in immigration court. The principal responsibility for ensuring due process and fairness lies with the immigration judge. If judges in place now are demonstrably less qualified than those who were passed over for political reasons, that situation must be rectified at once -- not with the passage of time.

It is up to Congress to ensure that the Justice Department cleans up, not covers up, the politicized hiring.

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"Justice at Justice" would more properly have been headlined "Let Crime Pay." By allowing partisan political and religious considerations to dominate their civil service hires, Monica Goodling and others betrayed the public trust in the most contemptible way.

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But you agree with the **Justice** Department's stance that the improper hires should be allowed to remain, because the chicanery was not theirs. So the degradation of government service would be allowed to stand.

The only fair solution is for the improperly filled jobs to be declared vacant and the improper hires allowed to compete on the basis of merit.

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