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As Gonzales Confirmation Vote Nears, Retired Hispanic General Urges Senators to Reject 1st Hispanic Attorney General Nominee

Says Senators Afraid to Oppose Gonzales' Confirmation for Fear of Being Labeled "Anti-Hispanic" are Doing "a Grave Disservice"

Albuquerque, NM – The first Hispanic Air National Guard officer appointed as an adjutant general in the United States today urged senators to reject the first Hispanic nominee for Attorney General, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales. The announcement comes just days before the Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to vote on Gonzales' nomination.

“Like Judge Gonzales, I know what it feels like to be the first Hispanic to be named to an important leadership position in this country,” said Major General Melvyn Montano (Ret. USAF National Guard), a Vietnam veteran who served 45 years in the military, including 18 years in a command position. “I welcome the prospect of more Hispanics serving in leadership positions in the government, and I respect Judge Gonzales' inspiring personal story. But I reject the notion that Hispanics should loyally support the nomination of a man who sat quietly by while administration officials discussed using torture against people in American custody, simply because he is one of our own.”

Gen. Montano was among 12 retired Admirals and Generals, including former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili (Ret. USA), who sent a letter to Senate Judiciary Committee members urging them to closely examine Gonzales' role in setting U.S. policy on torture during his January 6 confirmation hearing. At the hearing, Judge Gonzales made little effort to clarify or disavow his positions. Repeatedly saying “I don't recall” when asked about his role and views regarding detainee and interrogation policy, Gonzales even asserted that he didn't remember whether he solicited the infamous torture memo from the Justice Department; the now-disavowed memo, addressed to Gonzales, begins with the words “You have asked for our office's views....”. In his follow-up written answers released this week, Gonzales continued to maintain he can't remember how the infamous torture memo was generated. Gonzales refused to explain the language in his own memo which implied that rejecting the applicability of the Geneva Conventions would insulate US personnel from prosecution for war crimes they might “need” to commit. Gonzales asserted that the Convention Against Torture's prohibition on cruel and inhuman treatment doesn't apply to aliens overseas.

“In my capacity as Major General of the National Guard, I oversaw 4,800 National Guard personnel,” added Gen. Montano. “Since many of our troops fighting in Iraq today are drawn from the National Guard, it is troubling to think of the danger that these soldiers are exposed to as a result of Judge Gonzales' views.”

“It is highly manipulative to label Americans who question Judge Gonzales' record on torture as anti-Hispanic,” concluded Gen. Montano. “Senators who are afraid to vote against his confirmation for this reason are doing themselves and their constituents a grave disservice. To evaluate Judge Gonzales on anything less than his record is shameful. It is offensive to those who value ethics and the rule of law, and it is offensive to those who respect qualifications based on worth rather than ethnicity.”

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