

Justice lawyer defends attorney firings

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A top Justice Department lawyer acknowledged Tuesday that more than a half-dozen U.S. attorneys were fired in the last year, in some cases without cause, but denied Democrats' charges that they were dismissed and replaced for political reasons.

But McNulty reminded the panel that federal prosecutors serve at the pleasure of the president. And he repeated Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' promise to submit the name of every replacement to the Senate for confirmation. McNulty spoke after weeks of accusations from Democrats that the forced resignations of prosecutors in Arkansas and California particularly were moves to reward Republican allies.

Judges often are not qualified to make those appointments, Gonzales told The Associated Press last month.

In Arkansas, H.E. Bud Cummins received a call from a Justice Department official last year telling him to resign and assuring him there was no cause for the firing, a fact McNulty confirmed Tuesday. Cummins' replacement was to be J. Timothy Griffin, a former aide to presidential counselor Karl Rove and a former military prosecutor.

McNulty denied she was fired in retaliation for Cunningham's conviction, calling Lam's pursuit of the case "a very good thing for the American people and the Department of Justice to accomplish."