

A new week has begun and Attorney General Gonzales must be feeling very claustrophobic. He is slowly, but increasingly hemmed in by Department of Justice documents, which are limiting his options to reinterpret statements he made in the past. An examination of the most recent Department of Justice documents, disclosed on Friday, shows Gonzales and his aides held a meeting on the Nov. 27, to discuss the dismissal of the U.S. Attorneys. Sen. Arlen Specter, a ranking Republican stated the documents "appear to contradict" Gonzales denials of participating in discussions involving the dismissals. On another front, Tasia Scolinos, a spokeswoman for the Justice Department, confirmed Gonzales was in attendance at the Nov. 27 meeting where the topic was the dismissals of U.S Attorneys, but that is not inconsistent with his past statements. Sen. Specter and Ms. Scolinos statements are offering a little wiggle room for Gonzales, by suggesting the problem of Gonzales credibility may lie in what was meant by "participation" and ultimately by the nature of information he received.

It is easy to dismiss these statements as nothing more than a public relations campaign to shore up any support Gonzales might have left. But there is a far ranging defense being floated here. One based on the idea someone, presumably in White House, decided on a policy and ordered Gonzales to have it carried out and he in turned farmed out the responsibility to a subordinate. In this case, the subordinate was Kyle Sampson, who at the time was his chief of staff. Gonzales had such faith and trust in Sampson's abilities, and integrity, the task was given without conditions or guidelines. Sampson had a free hand to operate as he saw fit, with only the most cursory supervision by his boss, Gonzales. This is where the wiggle room for defense comes into play. By allowing Sampson to plan and execute the dismissal policy with such independence, it guaranteed limited access to the information, mainly to those directly involved. Gonzales can claim information he received from Sampson dealt with the progress of implementing the policy, and nothing more. An allusion to the old, "I had only known" defense, where ignorance is fundamental.

While appealing to ignorance, Gonzales may avoid any charges of wrongdoing. At most he can be accused of being inept and having extremely bad judgment, grounds enough for congress to ask him to move on. Without documents or testimony by others in the government to clearly contradict his claim of ignorance, the defense works. The real problem is, a limited success of this defense allows for a chain of ignorance to reach high into government and give other officials wiggle room as well. Best for congress to end ignorance before it spreads and the absolution for all wrongdoing it will grant.