

Midwest Environmental ADVOCATES

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Midwest Environmental Advocates included on Department of Justice “liberal” blacklist

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Contact: Karen Schapiro, Executive Director, 414-507-7049

Madison, WI – On June 24, 2008, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of the Inspector General released a report that found that candidates for the U.S. Attorney General’s Honors Program and Summer Law Intern Program in 2002 and 2006 may have been removed from consideration due to their political affiliations, organizational memberships, or ideologies.

The report found that the two programs were “fundamentally changed” in 2002 by an Attorney General’s Working Group created by then-Attorney General John Ashcroft with the intent to give “senior leadership more input into the selection of candidates.” That influence came in the form of a “screening committee” made up of political appointees who would “deselect” candidates based on the affiliations they listed on their applications.

The report states that in 2002 “candidates with Democratic Party and liberal affiliations apparent on their application were deselected at a significantly higher rate than candidates with Republican Party, conservative or neutral affiliations.” A compiled list of organizations that were flagged during the 2002 Honors Program screening process included Madison-based Midwest Environmental Advocates, as well as other prominent organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union, Human Rights Watch, the Nature Conservancy, Planned Parenthood and Sierra Club.

Few deselections were made from 2003 to 2005. Yet again in 2006, after Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez resurrected the screening committee, a disproportionate number of candidates with liberal affiliations compared to candidates with conservative affiliations were deselected from the programs.

Karen Schapiro, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates, stated she is troubled to learn that Midwest Environmental Advocates was pigeon-holed as a “liberal” organization and is concerned with the partisan nature of the selection process.

“MEA has always strived to work for the environment with the highest level of integrity. We seek to find solutions to environmental problems working within state and federal

laws, holding ourselves to the highest standards,” Schapiro said. “Our mission is to step in when the government is unable or unwilling. We do not have a partisan agenda.”

This report is the first of several investigations at the Department of Justice after the firing of eight U.S. Attorneys in December 2006 raised the issue of discrimination based upon political affiliation.

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Midwest Environmental Advocates was founded in 1999 as Wisconsin's first and only public interest environmental law center. MEA's mission is to provide high quality legal services that support a multicultural, grassroots social movement; build local leadership; and implement innovative solutions to environmental problems.