

HISPANIC LINK

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## PULLING THE WOOL

By José de la Isla

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HOUSTON—Attorney General Alberto Gonzáles and PBS filmmaker Ken Burns pose important issues affecting not just Hispanics, but our full nation. Each demands immediate attention.

Both have to do with what kind of a country we want to be.

Gonzáles faced a U.S. Senate committee grilling where he won no new friends. Instead, he attracted more calls for his resignation. The AG has been under pressure to resign because of the way his office fired eight regional U.S. attorneys. It did so, evidence is building, for political reasons and mismanagement of the public trust.

Gonzáles is suspected of allowing improper White House interference in the firings. The underlying issue is whether he functions in his job as a political operative or as the public's top law enforcement officer.

During his five hours on the hot seat, he certainly was not as forthright as he should have been. His "humble" approach looked to senators and viewers alike as stumbling and evasive at a time when truth and strength would have served everyone better.

An underlying concern is about leadership and public responsiveness. Elected and appointed officials are in their positions to decide on tough, hair-splitting issues that affect everyone — about facts, truth and consequences.

It's certainly not about pulling the wool over anybody's eyes, no matter how many e-mails or constituent votes are gained and lost.

The issue is whether the man who carries in his head many secrets is conducting a White House political strategy or the people's business. By testifying 71 times that he didn't remember or couldn't recall important meetings was the death knell.

To restore credibility, said the California Democrat Nancy Pelosi, the powerful House Speaker, "Alberto Gonzáles must resign." So did a pair of conservative Republican senators, Jeff Sessions (Ala.) and Tom Coburn (Okla.).

Senator Mel Martínez, GOP national committee chairman, was strangely silent after Gonzáles' testimony.

That brings up the Ken Burns' duplicity. Burns is the producer who plans to air a PBS television documentary in September about World War II.

The 14-hour film, titled "The War," leaves out mention of the half-million Hispanics who participated, the 12 Latino Congressional Medal of Honor winners, and the import, unique role of Native Americans.

Latino civic leaders, advocates for veterans and civil rights organizations, Congress members, professors and some journalists are furious. After all, PBS is supposed to be for the national public.

At first, PBS president Paula Kerger said no changes would be made. Then she said some kind of local-option additions to the broadcast were possible.

As Hispanic pressures intensified, Burns and Kerger joined in praise of the Hispanic contribution and promised, using careful, misleading language, to accede to the Latino groups' demands. They promised to incorporate the significant contributions of Latinos and Native Americans into the program. They agreed to hire a Latino to oversee the new elements.

Now, it turns out, they do not plan to re-edit the 14-hour documentary at all.

Their insulting abuse of the public trust leaves viewers with what amounts to dysfunctional myth-making out of U.S. history.

Although rarely taught or passed on from one generation to the next, the Latino experience can instruct the rest of the country a lot about the nation we have constructed. World War II was the great awakening about conditions back home when the vets returned from the war. Never again would Hispanics or others of color allow themselves to be manipulated or accepting of unresponsive government and manipulative public officials.

If Gonzáles should be fired for violating the public trust, so should Kerger. Both were entrusted with the public interest.

The issues are weighty. They ought to be of equal concern to a national audience. They are about our nationhood, about not letting those responsible get away with promoting their private interests at others' expense.

It has to do with how we see ourselves as a nation. That shouldn't get lost in the fray.

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