



## DesJarlais supporting effort to impeach Holder

Paul C. Barton, Gannett Washington Bureau

November 29, 2013

WASHINGTON -- Republican Rep. Scott DesJarlais doesn't mind that many political observers dismiss his effort to impeach Attorney General Eric Holder as a publicity stunt.

DesJarlais, of Jasper, contends his constituents are behind it, and that's all that matters.

"Right is right. The attorney general has violated the law and is not fit to serve the American people. I cannot control the actions of other members of the House and Senate, but I can and will represent the wishes of my district," the lawmaker said in a statement Wednesday.

DesJarlais was one of the original co-sponsors of a bill filed earlier this month that calls for the House to impeach Holder -- an action tantamount to an indictment -- for "high crimes and misdemeanors," so that he can face a Senate trial and possible removal from office.

In all, 23 Republicans back the effort, which originated with Rep. Pete Olson of Texas. Others involved include representatives who are well-known for speaking out against President Barack Obama, such as Reps. Louie Gohmert of Texas and Michele Bachmann of Minnesota. The only other Tennessee member involved is Rep. Phil Roe of Johnson City.

Among the charges they make against Holder:

-- Refusal to comply with a subpoena issued by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on October 12, 2011, seeking information and documents regarding Operation Fast and Furious. Fast and Furious was a plan to allow guns from the United States to pass into the hands of smugglers in hopes they could ultimately be traced to those running Mexican drug cartels. Federal officials lost track of hundreds of firearms, many of which have been linked to crimes.

-- Failure to enforce multiple laws, including the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, the Controlled Substances Act and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Even though they fault him with failing to defend it, the Supreme Court ruled the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional in June.

-- Refusal to prosecute the Internal Revenue Service officials involved in the alleged targeting of conservative political groups.

-- Giving allegedly false testimony under oath before Congress on May 15, 2013, about the Justice Department investigation of journalist James Rosen. The department seized email records of Rosen, a Fox News reporter, as part of an investigation of leaks of classified material. The department's pursuit of records of other news organizations proved controversial as well.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the impeachment bill.

"It seems Mr. Holder has confused his job to enforce the law with a permission to disobey it," DesJarlais said.

"The conduct displayed by the attorney general would lead to criminal charges being filed against any other American. Mr. Holder should not receive special consideration solely based on his title."

But some observers see it as another in a series of politically motivated attacks by House Republicans on Obama.

"This is just another political sideshow from House Republicans to try to slow down the Obama administration," said Don Kusler, executive director of Americans for Democratic Action, a liberal advocacy group.

"There is an ideological lean in their charges."

And Jim Kessler, vice president for policy at Third Way, a moderate think tank, added:

"Republican threats to impeach Attorney General Holder appeal to the tiny slice of ultra-conservative voters who are reflexively anti-Obama. The impeachment of Holder should never happen and will never happen."

But conservative analysts contend the House members are rightly concerned with how Holder has run the Justice Department.

"He has been held in criminal and civil contempt by the House. That's not a laughable matter," said Ilya Shapiro, a legal policy expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

The contempt vote came in June 2012, as Republicans reacted angrily to Holder's failure to produce documents related to Fast and Furious.

"He has done a lot to discredit the department," Shapiro said, adding that the attorney general has gone overboard in turning various legal issues into matters of alleged racial discrimination.

Overall, Shapiro said, "It's a lot more serious than anything raised about Janet Reno or John Ashcroft." Reno was attorney general under former President Bill Clinton; Ashcroft served under George W. Bush.