
From the Congress

Impeach Cheney! 'A Case for Hearings'

U.S. Representatives and Members of the House Judiciary Committee Robert Wexler (D-Fla.), Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.) are circulating this commentary column for publication and endorsement. After it was turned down by the New York Times, Washington Post, and Miami Herald, Wexler announced, on Dec. 14, 2007, that he was launching an Internet campaign to force the Judiciary Committee to hold hearings on H.Res. 333, Rep. Dennis Kucinich's (D-Ohio) resolution to impeach Dick Cheney.

On November 7, the House of Representatives voted to send a resolution of impeachment of Vice President Cheney to the Judiciary Committee. As Members of the House Judiciary Committee, we strongly believe these important hearings should begin.

The issues at hand are too serious to ignore, including credible allegations of abuse of power that if proven may well constitute high crimes and misdemeanors under our constitution. The charges against Vice President Cheney relate to his deceptive actions leading up to the Iraq war, the revelation of the identity of a covert agent for political retaliation, and the illegal wiretapping of American citizens.

Now that former White House press secretary Scott McClellan has indicated that the Vice President and his staff purposefully gave him false information about the outing of Valerie Plame Wilson as a covert agent to report to the American people, it is even more important for Congress to investigate what may have been an intentional obstruction of justice. Congress should call Mr. McClellan to testify about what he described as being asked to "unknowingly [pass] along false information." In addition, recent revelations have shown that the Administration including Vice President Cheney may have again manipulated and exaggerated evidence about weapons of mass destruction—this time about Iran's nuclear capabilities.

Some of us were in Congress during the impeachment hearings of President Clinton. We spent a year and a half listening to testimony about President Clinton's personal relations. This must not be the model for impeachment inquiries. A Democratic Congress can show that it takes its constitutional authority seriously and hold a sober investigation, which will stand in stark contrast to the kangaroo court con-

vened by Republicans for President Clinton. In fact, the worst legacy of the Clinton impeachment—where the GOP pursued trumped up and insignificant allegations—would be that it discourages future Congresses from examining credible and significant allegations of a constitutional nature when they arise.

The charges against Vice President Cheney are not personal. They go to the core of the actions of this Administration, and deserve consideration in a way the Clinton scandal never did. The American people understand this, and a majority support hearings according to a November 13 poll by the American Research Group. In fact, 70% of voters say that Vice President Cheney has abused his powers and 43% say that he should be removed from office right now. The American people understand the magnitude of what has been done and what is at stake if we fail to act. It is time for Congress to catch up.

Some people argue that the Judiciary Committee can not proceed with impeachment hearings because it would distract Congress from passing important legislative initiatives. We disagree. First, hearings need not tie up Congress for a year and shut down the nation. Second, hearings will not prevent Congress from completing its other business. These hearings involve the possible impeachment of the Vice President—not our commander in chief—and the resulting impact on the nation's business and attention would be significantly less than the Clinton Presidential impeachment hearings. Also, despite the fact that President Bush has thwarted moderate Democratic policies that are supported by a vast majority of Americans—including children's health care, stem cell research, and bringing our troops home from Iraq—the Democratic Congress has already managed to deliver a minimum wage hike, an energy bill to address the climate crisis and bring us closer to energy independence, assistance for college tuition, and other legislative successes. We can continue to deliver on more of our agenda in the coming year while simultaneously fulfilling our constitutional duty by investigating and publicly revealing whether or not Vice President Cheney has committed high crimes and misdemeanors.

Holding hearings would put the evidence on the table, and the evidence—not politics—should determine the outcome. Even if the hearings do not lead to removal from office, putting these grievous abuses on the record is important for the sake of history. For an Administration that has consistently skirted the constitution and asserted that it is above the law, it is imperative for Congress to make clear that we do not accept this dangerous precedent. Our Founding Fathers provided Congress the power of impeachment for just this reason, and we must now at least consider using it.

For more info on this campaign go to www.WexlerWantsHearings.com.