

The Suddenly Impeachable Mr. Cheney

I count myself among long time observers of the US political system who find it hard not to be pessimistic about the future prospects for democracy in America. With no real checks or balances on our megalomaniac President and Vice President by the Congress or courts and a mainstream media that serves as a megaphone for state propaganda, it's not looking good for democracy.

Nowhere is the failure of our democracy more apparent than over the issue of impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney for the multiple high crimes they have committed against the people of the world. When new House Speaker Nancy Pelosi took impeachment "off the table" before the Democrats even warmed their seats as the new majority party after the 2006 election, she effectively neutered the only process the Constitution allows for holding these chief executives accountable for their crimes.

But wait... last week something amazing happened that has made even an old cynic like me sit up, smile, and take notice of the unpredictable turns that our wacky political system can take.

Back on April 24, 2007 Representative Dennis Kucinich of Ohio submitted Resolution 333 to the House Judiciary Committee, which presented evidence for three articles of impeachment against Vice President Cheney. Resolution 333 is also co-sponsored by 22 other representatives, but true to her word, Speaker Pelosi has not allowed the House Judiciary Committee to schedule hearings on Kucinich's impeachment resolution.

Frustrated by Pelosi's stranglehold over the democratic process, the wily Kucinich used an arcane House procedure that allows any single Representative to go around the leadership and bring a "privileged resolution" directly to the floor of the House for debate. On November 6, 2007 Kucinich reintroduced his articles of impeachment as Privileged Resolution 799 on the House floor. But before the debate could begin Democratic House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland immediately introduced a motion to table H. Res. 799 to prevent any discussion of impeachment from taking place.

Here is where the fun begins. In a surprise move in the middle of the vote on Hoyer's motion to table, the Republicans decided that they wanted to embarrass Speaker Pelosi by having the impeachment of Cheney debated on the House floor against her will, so they began voting against Hoyer's motion to table H. Res. 799. The final vote was 251 to 162 against tabling, with 165 Republicans joining 86 Democrats against. You gotta admire those Republicans – at least they're not afraid to play their hand.

Still determined not to have impeachment debated on the House floor, Pelosi countered the Republicans by having Hoyer introduce a new motion to refer H. Res. 799 to the House Judiciary Committee for further study. With most Democrats voting in favor, this motion passed 218 to 194, effectively giving Kucinich the hearing with the Judiciary Committee that he had wanted all along. Isn't it amazing how things work out sometimes?

House Resolution 799 contains three articles of impeachment against Cheney: 1) he purposely manipulated the intelligence process to deceive the citizens and Congress of the United States by fabricating a threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify the use of the US Armed Forces against the nation of Iraq, 2) he purposely deceived the nation about an alleged relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda and, 3) he has openly threatened aggression against the Republic of Iran absent any real threat to the US. Of course there are many other impeachable charges against Cheney that are not included in the Resolution like his part in the authorization of torture, the suspension of habeas corpus, warrantless wiretaps and the outing of undercover CIA agent Valerie Plame, just to name a few.

At this point it is instructive to note that when the House Judiciary Committee was drawing up articles of impeachment against President Dick Nixon back in 1974 they debated whether to include his illegal bombing of Cambodia but ultimately decided against it. If back then, when a strong pro-impeachment Democratic majority would not dare question the criminality of Nixon's war policies, I very much doubt today's pathetically weak anti-impeachment Democrats will dare question the war policies of Vice President Dick Cheney. The US government is systemically incapable of indicting itself for its own doctrinal crimes.

The articles of impeachment against Nixon did include obstruction of justice and warrantless wiretapping. These charges of narrow technical administrative crimes have a much better chance of sticking against Cheney than Kucinich's charges of doctrinal crimes (as legitimate as they may be) and should be added to the articles of impeachment at the Judiciary Committee hearings.

What little coverage this remarkable happenstance has received in the mainstream media has mostly been slanted to make it sound like Kucinich is just plain crazy and that Cheney is a paragon of virtue. But even with this attempted whitewash by the media most Americans have somehow gotten the message that Cheney's actions are highly suspect and a recent poll taken by the American Research Group found that 54% of American adults already want the House of Representatives to begin impeachment proceedings against the Vice President; and this before a single piece of incriminating evidence has been presented to the Judiciary Committee. What's more, the same poll found that 46% of voters are already in favor of impeaching President Bush. These numbers are bound to go up once hearings actually begin

Unfortunately, the House motion to send Kucinich's impeachment resolution to the Judiciary Committee did not contain a deadline. Right now is a very good time for YOU my fellow citizens to call Congressman John Conyers' (Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee at 202-225-5126) and demand that he schedule hearings on Resolution 799 immediately. As the people demand justice from the ground up, we will find out whether democracy still has a pulse in America.