

House Republicans block vote to condemn racist group

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The Republican majority in the US House of Representatives is using parliamentary maneuvers to prevent a vote on a resolution condemning the white supremacist views of the Council of Conservative Citizens. Several Republican congressional leaders have had close ties with the organization, including Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi.

The CCC is the successor organization to the White Citizens Councils, which served as the upper-class counterpart of the Ku Klux Klan, directing KKK violence against blacks and civil rights organizers during the 1950s and 1960s. The top leaders of the CCC all have their origins in the White Citizens Councils and the CCC's print and web publications advocate a racist and segregationist viewpoint.

The organization first came to widespread public notice when it was revealed in December that Georgia Congressman Robert Barr, a member of the House Judiciary Committee and leading advocate of Clinton's impeachment, had addressed a meeting of the CCC last summer. Barr defended his appearance before the CCC and cited Lott's much longer connection to the organization.

The CCC has its most widespread support in Mississippi, with more than one-third of state legislators, Democratic and Republican alike, claiming affiliation. Lott's uncle Arnie, a one-time state senator, was chairman of the CCC branch in Carroll County, where the Senate Republican leader grew up.

Neither Clinton nor the Democratic congressional leadership made a public issue of the ties of Barr and Lott to the CCC during the House impeachment hearings and the Senate trial, and the media for the most part buried the issue. The virtual silence of the Democrats on the role of fascistic and racist forces in the Republican Party expressed the Democratic Party's

complicity in concealing from the public the extent of the threat to democratic rights embodied in the impeachment conspiracy.

In the aftermath of the impeachment process, a resolution which "condemns the racism and bigotry espoused by the Council of Conservative Citizens" was introduced into the House by Democrat Robert Wexler of Florida and Republican Michael Forbes of New York. On March 18, at a press conference on Capitol Hill, Wexler and Forbes announced that they had attracted nine Republican and 138 Democratic co-sponsors, and they criticized the refusal of the House Republican leadership to allow the resolution to come for a vote.

The same day House Republican Conference Chairman J.C. Watts, the lone black Republican, introduced his own resolution condemning bigotry and racist and anti-Semitic groups in general, but not naming any organization in particular.

This resolution, which required a two-thirds majority to win approval under House rules, was brought to a vote March 23. It failed to pass, with 252 votes in favor and 154 against. Most Democrats opposed the bill, demanding the right to vote on the original resolution condemning the Council of Conservative Citizens by name.

The failure to bring the Wexler-Forbes resolution to a vote demonstrates the enormous influence which extreme right and racist elements have in the highest councils of the Republican Party. It is impossible for the US Congress to adopt even the most perfunctory condemnation of white supremacist views which only a few years ago would have been regarded--at least publicly--as entirely beyond the pale.



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