

Democrats scuttle Cheney impeachment measure: fraud turns into farce

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With their usual combination of cowardice and complicity, Democratic congressmen buried a resolution to impeach Vice President Dick Cheney on Tuesday. Underscoring their fundamental support for the Bush administration, leading Democrats went out of their way to insist that impeachment is not and will never be up for consideration.

The resolution itself, introduced by Democratic congressman and presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, is a fraud, intended to serve the same function as Kucinich—to give the Democrats an oppositional coloration even as they collaborate in all aspects of the Bush administration's policy. Kucinich never intended it as a serious proposal, and it would have been quietly tabled without further ado if it were not for a last minute maneuver by House Republicans to try to force a vote and call the Democrats' bluff.

Kucinich's measure cited three grounds for impeaching Cheney—lying to the American people about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, lying about Iraq's ties to Al Qaeda, and issuing threats of war against Iran. Kucinich did not introduce a measure calling for the impeachment of Bush, exposing the unserious character of the proposal.

While citing the loss of American and Iraqi lives, along with hundreds of billions of dollars, the resolution also makes an appeal to sections of the military and political establishment who feel that the Bush administration's policy in Iraq has undermined military strength and the ability to intervene elsewhere. US Armed Forces have been used "against the nation of Iraq in a manner damaging to our national security interests," it states. In particular, it has led to "the loss of military readiness...due to overextension, lack of training and lack of equipment." It has also led to "the loss of United States credibility in world affairs."

Democrats expected a vote to table the measure Tuesday afternoon to succeed by a comfortable margin, thus delaying consideration of the issue indefinitely. As the vote was being tallied, however, Republicans switched course, with the party leadership counseling its members to try to force a debate.

"We're going to help them out, to explain themselves," Republican Representative Pete Sessions said. "We're going to give them their day in court."

Republicans have used similar tactics before, whenever they have considered it useful for partisan purposes to expose the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party. Earlier this year, for example, Republicans moved to package a Democratic-backed Senate resolution voicing some criticisms of the "surge" policy in Iraq with another resolution pledging never to cut off funding for the war. The Democratic leadership, knowing that a vote critical of the surge would not get through, while the vote on funding would sail through easily, was forced to table both measures.

In this instance, Democrats, terrified that they would have to debate the impeachment resolution—and knowing that it would be rejected overwhelmingly—scrambled for a way to stall it. After the vote to table it failed, the Democratic leadership proposed a motion to send it into the House Judiciary Committee for further consideration. This vote passed 218-194, with only four Democrats, including Kucinich, joining the Republicans in voting against.

The whole voting process, which was supposed to last only 15 minutes, was dragged on for nearly two hours as the Democratic Party leadership cobbled together the necessary votes.

Leading Democrats then lined up to insist that they had no interest in impeachment. "Impeachment is not on our agenda," said House Majority Leader Steny

Hoyer. “We have some major priorities. We need to focus on those.” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi repeated her position that “impeachment is off the table.”

Representative John Conyers, who as chairman of the Judiciary Committee will now have the task of sitting on the impeachment resolution until Cheney is safely out of office, declared, “If [Pelosi] were to let this thing out of the box, considering the number of legislative issues we have pending...it could create a split that could affect our productivity for the rest of the Congress.”

In July, Conyers had Cindy Sheehan and other antiwar activists arrested after they occupied his office in an attempt to pressure him to pursue impeachment. At the time, Conyers was sitting on a separate resolution that was basically identical to the one introduced this week.

Conyers generally positions himself on the “left” of the Democratic Party. In 2005-2006, when the Democrats were in the minority in Congress, he held hearings on impeachment. Once the Democrats were in a position to actually pursue impeachment—which requires only a majority vote in the House of Representatives—the issue was shelved.

Kucinich, unfazed, attempted to bolster the credentials of those who voted to shelve his resolution. “This vote sends a message that the administration’s conduct in office is no longer unchallenged.... Hopefully, it will have a restraining effect on the administration to stop this madness.” He did not explain how the vote—in which Democrats not only rejected impeachment, but rejected even a debate on impeachment—represents a challenge to the administration.

In fact, Kucinich never intended the resolution to be anything more than a smokescreen. In April, he told CNN that he was not going to “promote” the earlier version of the resolution. “Members of Congress will have to search their own conscience.”

In the media, the actions of the Democratic leadership have been explained as a response to a conflict between a relatively small section of their supporters and mainstream public opinion. Typical was a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, which said that “a clash [over impeachment] would have forced Democrats to choose between their liberal base, which might cheer a Cheney impeachment, and a broader electorate, which might

view the resolution as a partisan game in a time of war.”

In fact, according to polls, a comfortable majority of the American population supports the impeachment of Cheney, and about half support an impeachment of Bush. American Research Group conducted a survey in July that found the population split 45 percent for and 46 percent against the impeachment of Bush, and 54-40 in favor of the impeachment of Cheney. This sentiment finds no serious reflection in the Democratic Party.

The Democrats are caught not between the American people and their “liberal base,” but between the American people and the sections of the American ruling class and the military for whom the Democratic Party speaks. Indeed, to discuss the impeachment of Cheney would raise uncomfortable questions about the Democrats’ own complicity in the decision to invade Iraq and the promotion of a war against Iran.

While having no fundamental differences with the Republicans—on militarism, social policy, or the attack on democratic rights—the Democrats attempt to posture as an opposition party. The farcical maneuvering over the impeachment vote is a predictable consequence.



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