

Give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union

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Those are the words used in Article II Section 3 of the US Constitution. The president is also to “recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” Why does this not come up in Article I with all the other supreme powers of our Commander in Chief? Well, because only the military has one of those, and Article I is devoted to the most powerful branch of our government, the Congress.

The president is supposed to inform Congress on how things are going in his work of executing the laws they pass. We didn’t hear much of that on Wednesday. President Obama did not mention his ban on prosecuting torture, his advisors’ claims that he has the power to torture, his use of rendition, his removal from the Constitution of the right to habeas corpus, his list of Americans to be assassinated, his warrantless spying, his protection of Bush, Cheney, and gang from exposure or prosecution, his continuation of illegal wars, his use of unmanned drones to assassinate and slaughter, or his assertion of the power of aggressive war in a Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. All of that went without saying.

And how’s the bailing out of Wall Street billionaires going? Obama asserted that he hated it but was doing it because it needed to be done even if unpopular. He bragged more than once through the speech about doing unpopular things, as though democratic representation was the new enemy. Thankfully, there wasn’t the same level of fear mongering about Terrorists that we’d grown used to in these speeches from Bush. But Congress cheered for the president ignoring the public and even cheered for the president unconstitutionally ignoring Congress. The whole room cheered when Obama said this:

“[T]he cost of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security will continue to skyrocket. That’s why I’ve called for a bipartisan, Fiscal Commission, modeled on a proposal by Republican Judd Gregg and Democrat Kent Conrad. This can’t be one of those Washington gimmicks that lets us pretend we solved a problem. The Commission will have to provide a specific set of solutions by a certain deadline. Yesterday, the Senate blocked a bill that would have created this commission. So I will issue an executive order that will allow us to go forward, because I refuse to pass this problem on to another generation of Americans.”

This is like Bush admitting the United Nations must sanction an aggressive war, failing to get that sanction, and proceeding to invade. Obama acknowledged that Congress needs to set its own agenda, failed to obtain the agenda he wanted, and went ahead anyway. And Congress cheered.

And what is the agenda? It is to attack things that do not cost us a dime, that more than

pay for themselves, and that the American people overwhelmingly approve of. Obama also proposed in the same speech freezing all spending on anything other than these programs (since he can't easily do that) or on killing people (his central mission, if we are to judge by actions rather than words). But it's on killing people that we are spending the vast bulk of our money, and ever increasing amounts of it. And that did not come up.

Nor did the president's failure to withdraw from Iraq come up. Instead, that is still in the future. Obama promised to withdraw "combat troops" by August and to withdraw "all troops" by some unstated date in the future. On Afghanistan he still only specified a date to begin a withdrawal that could never end.

Most of what the president talked about was jobs and the economy, healthcare and education. But his proposals ranged from undefined to small to puny in comparison with most of what he and Congress are doing. They are dumping ever greater shares of our money into the one place that creates the fewest jobs: wars and the military. There were some good proposals, some vague proposals, and some proposals to cut more taxes for the plutocracy. But it was all small-scale in comparison with the budgetary choices being acted upon. And it was all a president telling Congress what to do in the future.

As for reported accomplishments, they were rather pathetic. Obama has put White House visitors' names online "for the first time in history". For how much of history has there been an "online"? And what about those sickness industry execs' names he refuses to put online? And what ever happened to televising the meetings? Now we're supposed to be happy with getting some of the names? This is pretty weak.

This speech could have benefitted from an audience more willing to shout and respond in ways other than applauding the worst parts and demanding something even worse.

David Swanson is the author of the new book "Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union" by Seven Stories Press. You can order it and find out when tour will be in your town:<http://davidswanson.org/book>.

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