

Land of Enchantment and Impeachment

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There is a decent chance that within the next month or two the New Mexico State Legislature will ask the U.S. House of Representatives to begin impeachment proceedings against President Bush and Vice President Cheney. And there is the definite possibility that a Congress Member from New Mexico will take up the matter when it gets to Washington. The Jefferson Manual, rules used by the U.S. House, allows for impeachment to be begun in this manner. It only takes one state legislature.

No governor is needed. One Congress Member, from the same state or any other, is needed to essentially acknowledge receipt of the state's petition. Then impeachment begins.

Last year the state legislatures of California, Minnesota, Illinois, and Vermont introduced but did not pass resolutions to send impeachment to the U.S. House. The State Senator who introduced the bill in Minnesota is now a member of Congress, Keith Ellison. He is one of many Congress Members waiting for the right moment to impeach Bush and Cheney. The state of New Jersey has a strong activist movement working to introduce and pass impeachment this year. There's a race now to see which state can do it first, which state can redeem these United States in the eyes of the world. New Mexico is jumping into the contest in a big way, with a terrific leading sponsor of the bill, strong Democratic majorities in both houses, and a citizens' movement ready to hold its government to account.

Of course, it is cities, not states, that have really taken the lead on impeachment, as on ending the war. Dozens of cities have already passed resolutions for impeachment. Dozens more have introduced them, and they are pending. [<http://www.afterdowningstreet.org/resourcecenter> [1]] A handful have introduced them and voted them down. On March 6th about 100 towns in Vermont will vote at public meetings for impeachment. But by March 6th, impeachment may already be underway.

There is a conflict brewing between Congress and the White House over the war and over the division of powers created by the U.S. Constitution and eliminated by this administration. If Bush attacks Iran and/or Syria without approval from Congress, or escalates the war in Iraq without approval from Congress, we may finally see Congress fight back. This President has rendered Congress almost meaningless. He reverses laws with "signing statements." He disregards laws at his whim, openly bragging about doing so. And he makes many operations secret, hidden even from Congress, refusing requests for information, including those filed under the Freedom of Information Act. When this President does communicate with Congress, he often provides false or misleading information, most notably in making the case for the current war.

Vice President Cheney has already said that he will likely refuse to appear before Congress if

subpoenaed. The White House will likely refuse subpoenas of any sort, and openly professes to believe the President is a “unitary executive.” White House spokesperson Tony Snow said on January 8th:

“The President has the ability to exercise his own authority if he thinks Congress has voted the wrong way.”

Americans voted in November for Congress to stand up to this assault on our democracy. We voted against the war, but we even voted out Republicans who were opposing the war. We threw out candidates who allowed Bush to campaign for them, and left in office those who refused.

While it is public knowledge that Bush launched the opening stages of the Iraq War in secret, without Congress’s approval or awareness, illegally using funds appropriated for Afghanistan and elsewhere, it has not always been as clear as it is at this moment that Bush will not end the war even if required by Congress to do so. Growing awareness of this fact is leading the peace movement to join the impeachment movement.

Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon Papers so many years ago, recently argued that it was only the pressure of the peace movement that allowed the impeachment of President Nixon to proceed, and that it was only the exposures and threat of impeachment that persuaded Nixon not to veto the bill that finally cut off the funding for the Vietnam War. As Congress exposes the crimes of Bush and Cheney to public view, it will move us closer to impeachment. As Congress Members begin to object to their powerless role of court jesters, they will move us closer to impeachment and also to bringing our troops home.

We should be encouraging our Congress Members to proceed immediately with key investigations [<http://www.afterdowningstreet.org/investigations> [2]] and to not be afraid to use subpoenas. We should also be encouraging state legislators in our own and other states who take up the cause of democracy. We need them to do so from their positions as elected officials closer to the people and further from the big dollars.

In New Mexico, a leading light of that state’s politics, State Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino of Albuquerque, will be leading the way on impeachment. He deserves the support of all the world, and you can thank him at jortizyp@aol.com [3] Let’s help him make New Mexico the land of enchantment and impeachment.

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