

# The Nation.

## Raising the Issue of Impeachment

by JOHN NICHOLS

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As President Bush and his aides scramble to explain new revelations regarding Bush's authorization of spying on the international telephone calls and emails of Americans, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, has begun a process that could lead to the censure, and perhaps the impeachment, of the president and vice president.

U.S. Representative John Conyers, the Michigan Democrat who was a critical player in the Watergate and Iran-Contra investigations into presidential wrongdoing, has introduced a package of resolutions that would censure President Bush and Vice President Cheney and create a select committee to investigate the Administration's possible crimes and make recommendations regarding grounds for impeachment.

The Conyers resolutions add a significant new twist to the debate about how to hold the administration to account. Members of Congress have become increasingly aggressive in the criticism of the White House, with U.S. Senator Robert Byrd, D-West Virginia, saying Monday, "Americans have been stunned at the recent news of the abuses of power by an overzealous President. It has become apparent that this Administration has engaged in a consistent and unrelenting pattern of abuse against our Country's law-abiding citizens, and against our Constitution." Even Republicans, including Senate Judiciary Committee chair Arlen Specter, R-Pennsylvania, are talking for the first time about mounting potentially serious investigations into abuses of power by the president.

But Conyers is seeking to do much more than schedule a committee hearing, or even launch a formal inquiry. He is proposing that the Congress use all of the powers that are available to it to hold the president and vice president to account – up to and including the power to impeach the holders of the nation's most powerful positions and to remove them from office.

The first of the three resolutions introduced by Conyers, H.Res.635, asks that the Congress establish a select committee to investigate whether members of the administration made moves to invade Iraq before receiving congressional authorization, manipulated pre-war intelligence, encouraged the use of torture in Iraq and elsewhere, and used their positions to retaliate against critics of the war.

The select committee would be asked to make recommendations regarding grounds for possible impeachment of Bush and Cheney.

The second resolution, H.Res.636, asks that the Congress to censure the president "for failing to respond to requests for information concerning allegations that he and others in his Administration misled Congress and the American people regarding the decision to go to war in Iraq, misstated and manipulated intelligence information regarding the justification for the war, countenanced torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of persons in Iraq, and permitted inappropriate retaliation against critics of his Administration, for failing to adequately account for specific misstatements he made regarding the war, and for

failing to comply with Executive Order 12958." (Executive Order 12958, issued in 1995 by former President Bill Clinton, seeks to promote openness in government by prescribing a uniform system for classifying, safeguarding, and declassifying national security information.)

A third resolution, H.Res.637, would censure Cheney for a similar set of complaints.

"The people of this country are waking up to the severity of the lies, crimes, and abuses of power committed by this president and his administration," says Jon Bonifaz, a co-founder of the AfterDowningStreet.org coalition, an alliance of more than 100 grassroots groups that has detailed Bush administration wrongdoing and encouraged a Congressional response. Bonifaz, an attorney and the author of the book, *Warrior King: The Case for Impeaching George Bush* (Nation Books), argues that, "Now is the time to return to the rule of law and to hold those who have defied the Constitution accountable for their actions."

Bonifaz is right. But it is unlikely that the effort to censure Bush and Cheney, let alone impeach them, will get far without significant organizing around the country. After all, the House is controlled by allies of the president who have displayed no inclination to hold him to account. Indeed, only a few Democrats, such as Conyers, have taken seriously the Constitutional issues raised by the administration's misdeeds.

Members of Congress in both parties will need to feel a lot of heat if these important measures are going to get much traction in this Congress.

**The grassroots group Progressive Democrats of America (PDA), which has had a good deal of success organizing activists who want the Democrats to take a more aggressive stance in challenging the administration, will play a critical role in the effort to mobilize support for the Conyers resolutions, as part of a new Censure Bush Coalition campaign. (The campaign's website can be found at [censurebush.org](http://censurebush.org))**

**PDA director Tim Carpenter says his group plans to "mobilize and organize a broad base coalition that will demand action from Congress to investigate the lies of the Bush administration and their conduct related to the war in Iraq."**

Getting this Congress to get serious about maintaining checks and balances on the Bush administration will be a daunting task. But the recent revelations regarding domestic spying will make it easier. There are a lot of Americans who share the view of U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, D-Wisconsin, that Bush and Cheney have exceeded their authority. As Feingold says of Bush, "He is the president, not a king."

It was the bitter experience of dealing with King George III led the founders of this country to write a Constitution that empowers Congress to hold presidents and vice accountable for their actions.

It is this power that John Conyers, the senior member of the House committee charged with maintaining the system of checks and balances established by those founders, is now asking the Congress to employ in the service of the nation that Constitution still governs.

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