

EIRFeature

The Battle for the U.S. Senate: It's Cheney vs. LaRouche

by Debra Hanania-Freeman

With just days to go before the Congress adjourns for its traditional July 4 recess, the U.S. Senate has been rendered almost dysfunctional because of unrelenting White House pressure on Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and the GOP leadership, in the face of intractable opposition to the Bush Administration's agenda.

Lyndon LaRouche, in his June 16 webcast, placed tremendous responsibility on the Senate, as the key institution of government under the U.S. Constitution, with the authority to act and provide systemic leadership during this time of great crisis, when the United States is faced with the greatest financial and economic collapse in modern history, and at a time that the inescapable truth is, that the President is mentally and intellectually incompetent to serve.

LaRouche stated: "[George Bush] has shown that mental incompetence: A man who says, as President of the United States, in a time that the national credit of the United States is in jeopardy, that U.S. government bonds are worthless, nothing more than worthless IOUs, that man is obviously mentally ill. And I think that mental illness is sufficient cause to remove him from office. The only problem in removing George from office is that, you've got to get rid of Cheney, too! Because Cheney is a sociopath, a killer! And you cannot have *that* guy in the White House."

At the time that LaRouche delivered his address, a bipartisan coalition of U.S. Senators, representing the majority of that body, had just successfully put down what was explicitly recognized as an attempted coup d'état by Vice President Dick Cheney and company, by defeating Cheney's so-called "nuclear option." LaRouche identified that group as the nucleus of a bipartisan concert of action that could be mobilized under his leadership to launch an economic recovery.

However, as George Bush's already very tenuous grasp on reality grows weaker in the face of mounting opposition from even his own party, Cheney is being increasingly driven to try to hold the situation together, and block the emerging bipartisan cooperation by any means necessary.



White House photo/Tina Hager

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist is under crushing pressure from Vice President Dick Cheney and White House political guru Karl Rove, not to give an inch toward compromise with the emerging Senate bipartisan coalition. Seated here with President Bush are Frist (right) and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (left). Cheney looms in the foreground.

Majority Leader Frist found himself repeatedly overruled by Cheney when Frist was engaged in negotiations with Democratic leader Harry Reid to avert a showdown on the nuclear option. Since then, Frist has faced repeated public humiliation at the hands of Cheney's outright thuggery.

Immediately after the defeat of Cheney's nuclear option, it was common knowledge on Capitol Hill that the Vice President had demanded, against Frist's personal judgment, that Senate Republicans escalate the fight to confirm John Bolton, Cheney's personal pick for U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Democrats had moved to block the Bolton nomination from coming to a vote, because of the White House's arrogant refusal to turn over certain information that Democrats believe is crucial to determining Bolton's fitness for the post. On May 26, acting under orders from the Vice President, Frist forced a vote to end the debate on Bolton and proceed with an up-or-down vote. For the second time in a week, Frist was dealt a humiliating defeat, when he couldn't muster the needed 60 votes to end the debate.

At the time, Democratic Senators Joe Biden (Del.) and Chris Dodd (Conn.) made clear that the White House could have their "yes-or-no" vote on Bolton "within 10 minutes of Dick Cheney's agreement" to turn over documents that the Senate is constitutionally entitled to. The White House, in another arrogant snub to the Senate's institutional rights, said no.

By late in the week of June 13, Frist's position hadn't improved. But, despite the fact that the Republican leadership could not identify even a single vote changed in favor of

cloture, Cheney—in an absolute refusal to face reality—insisted that a cloture vote be scheduled. The Senate voted on the question again on Monday, June 20, and again, the measure failed. In fact, this time, Republican George Voinovich (Oh.), who publicly opposes Bolton's nomination, but who was willing to let the nomination come to a vote, changed his vote and voted with the Democrats opposing an end to the debate.

Democratic leader Harry Reid (Nev.) made clear that the issue was no longer merely one of the merits of the nomination, but had emerged as a vote in defense of the Senate's institutional responsibility of advice and consent. "They put partisanship ahead of the Constitution and the Senate's right to receive information from the executive branch of government," Reid said. "Unless the President comes forward with information which we're certain we're constitutionally entitled to, Bolton will not get enough votes" to end debate on his nomination and move to a decisive vote.

The Administration threatened to follow its failure with a "recess appointment" of Bolton, which would put him at the United Nations until the end of 2006. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, speaking on behalf of an Administration that has repeatedly violated the Constitution, preached to the press that such an appointment was the President's Constitutional right. The statement infuriated the Democrats, and met with near uniform opposition by Senate Republicans, who rightly asserted that such an appointment would be a glaring sign of Bush's weakness. Frist issued a public statement that he would not seek another cloture vote, instead

favoring some negotiated agreement on the documents in question. Then, on June 22, Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) called on the White House to give the Democrats the documents they are demanding. There were growing rumors that Republican leaders were urging the President to make another nomination for the post.

Within hours, Senate Republicans were dragged back to the White House. According to Administration sources, Cheney personally persuaded Bush to order Frist to keep fighting for an up-or-down vote and, indeed, at the meeting the Tennessee Republican was told in no uncertain terms that the White House would tolerate no compromise and no backing off. Frist emerged from the meeting and once again humiliated himself by reversing the position he had taken just hours earlier.

The same meeting produced an elaborate scheme to protect Bush from conceding defeat on his obsessive commitment to privatize Social Security, by introducing a package of new legislation that Democrats slammed as nothing more than an elaborate bait-and-switch gimmick.

As even Frist acknowledges, Cheney, as President of the Senate, has usurped the role of meeting with Senate Republicans every Tuesday to dictate the week's agenda. And, although such an overt role by Cheney makes him more vulnerable to a fall, it has also created a situation in which the Democratic leadership is increasingly questioning whether there is any point at all in talking to Frist and the GOP leadership, who have been rendered virtually impotent. The situation is not only contentious, but has brought deliberation to a virtual halt.

Roving Idiots

Despite growing discontent from members of its own party, the Administration seems intent on plunging deeper into the abyss. On June 22, President Bush's chief political advisor, Karl Rove, delivered a speech at a Conservative Party dinner in New York City, just a few miles from Ground Zero, in which he blatantly lied and mischaracterized the Democratic response to the events of Sept. 11. Rove said that Democrats "saw the savagery of the 9/11 attacks and wanted to prepare indictments and offer therapy and understanding for our attackers." He said that the Democratic Party called for "moderation and restraint" after the terrorist attacks. "We saw the savagery of 9/11 and the attacks," Rove said, "and we prepared for war."

Democrats were outraged by the vicious dishonesty and partisan nature of the comments. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) immediately issued a statement saying that New York has been unified regardless of party affiliation since Sept. 11, and "to inject politics into this and to defame a large number of people is not only outrageous, it is not what New York and America is all about." Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) said that nearly 3,000 Americans died on Sept. 11 and "we should not dishonor their memory by using that

tragic day for political trash talk."

During a hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, in which Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and other military leaders testified, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) read Rove's statement and urged them to reject the remarks. "I would hope that you and other members of the Administration would immediately repudiate such an insulting comment from a high-ranking official in the President's inner circle," she said. The hearing became so contentious that before it was over, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) called on Rumsfeld to resign. And, before the day was over, Clinton, Schumer, and Sen. Jon Corzine (D-N.J.) held a press conference, again calling on the President to repudiate the remarks.

They pointed out that three days after the terrorist attacks, the Senate voted 98-0 and the House voted 420-1 for a resolution authorizing President Bush to use all necessary and appropriate force against those responsible. After the votes, Mr. Bush issued a statement which said, "I am gratified that the Congress has united so powerfully by taking this action. It sends a clear message—our people are together, and we will prevail."

As Democratic outrage mounted, Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean called Rove's remarks divisive and damaging. Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, in a stinging rebuke, demanded a full and complete apology from Rove and stated on the Senate floor that Rove should resign.

The White House rejected the demands. At a White House press briefing, Press Secretary Scott McClellan defended Rove and insisted that Rove was just "telling it like it is."

Although the opposition to the Administration's increasingly desperate behavior is growing among Republicans, and Democratic opposition is hardening, the immediate problem is that Senate deliberation has come to a virtual halt.

Lyndon LaRouche, whose leadership since the November election has become increasingly decisive, was in no mood to compromise. Reiterating statements he made in his June 16 webcast, LaRouche stressed that with a President who has proven to be thoroughly incapable of coping with the current crisis, nothing can be allowed to impede the ability of the U.S. Senate to function. LaRouche said, "The American people have the right to know that all aspects of this nation's domestic and foreign policy have been rendered dysfunctional because of White House pressures on the Senate, applied in the person of Dick Cheney." LaRouche pointed out that both Bush and Cheney have already provided sufficient grounds for removal from office, and that the time had come for members of the U.S. Senate to step forward and tell the American people the truth. LaRouche said, "If a core of the Senate leadership go to the American people and tell them that this is the way it is, the people will listen."

Some questions and answers from LaRouche's webcast immediately follow.