

## Bipartisan Coalition Won't Work Until Cheney Goes

by Nancy Spannaus

A pattern of bipartisan collaboration in Congress, against the outrageous negligence or abuses being carried out by the Cheney-Bush Administration, has raised the hopeful potential for Congressional action in areas such as rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina, and stopping police-state abuses. However, as Lyndon LaRouche has pointed out, the expression of Congressional concern is nothing but impotent kvetching, if the legislators do not remove the lawless Cheney apparatus from power.

In every significant area of policy, the Cheney apparatus has thrown down the gauntlet to Congress: Either move to impeach us, or submit to our unlimited prerogatives to do what we wish. This was made starkly clear when President Bush announced at his signing of the Defense Authorization Bill with the McCain anti-torture amendment, that he was reserving the right to interpret that statute from the standpoint of his arbitrarily claimed powers as Commander-in-Chief. A similar message was delivered during the appearance of Attorney General Alberto "Stonewall" Gonzales at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on National Security Agency (NSA) eavesdropping, on Feb. 6. Gonzales, who gets his orders from Cheney and Cheney's chief counsel (now chief-of-staff) David Addington, asserted that the President had the right to violate the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), by authorizing wiretaps without a warrant, and showed no signs of recognizing the law.

But what has the Congress done? It has asked for investigations and hearings. In fact, the Administration even agreed, in the face of Rep. Heather Wilson (R-N.M.) demanding an investigation, to hold closed-door briefings on the wiretap program, to both the full Senate and House Intelligence Committees. But, as Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) said, listening to Gonzales stonewall in private session was no more enlightening than it was in the public hearing.

Faced with an Administration that lies, stonewalls, threatens, and asserts unrestricted Executive power, the Congress cannot get anywhere by asking for more testimony, or even new legislation. The Cheney-Bush Administration cares nothing for the law, so there is no need to discuss changing the law under which FISA operates. The only alternative is to move for prosecutions, and impeachment. So far, there is little motion in Congress on this front.

Instead, the Republican leaders of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees are acting as enforcers for Cheney. An aide to Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.), head of the House committee, told the *New York Times* Feb. 17 that any investigation would be limited in scope; whereas Wilson had called for one of "multiple avenues." On the Senate side, Intelligence Committee chair Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) has maneuvered to postpone any investigation at all, after the White House, with its fingers crossed behind its back, agreed to open discussions about changing Federal surveillance law.

### Blasting Bush on Katrina

But there is a lot of talk, coming from both sides of the aisle, on the failures of the Bush Administration. One of the most dramatic examples of bipartisan unrest is in the area of the Administration's abysmal failure in dealing with Hurricane Katrina. Congressional reports and testimony presented Feb. 10-15, on the Administration's failed Hurricane Katrina response, showed that the President and his key homeland security advisors were aware of the dangers of the oncoming storm, yet failed to act quickly to save lives. This was, as LaRouche charged soon after Katrina hit the U.S. Gulf Coast on Aug. 28, 2005, *de facto* criminal negligence.

The evidence of this negligence is now so overwhelming that on Feb. 15, the all-Republican, 11-member House Select Committee on Katrina released a 600-page investigative re-

port, which found failure at all levels of government, including at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the White House. The report concluded that, shunning early levee breach reports, arguing that there were conflicting reports, “the White House failed to de-conflict varying damage assessments and discounted information that ultimately proved accurate.”

In releasing the report, Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.), the chairman of the House Select Katrina Committee, said, “Our investigation revealed that Katrina was a national failure, an abdication of the most solemn obligation to provide for the common welfare. At every level, individual, corporate, philanthropic, and governmental, we failed to meet the challenge that was Katrina.”

DHS head Michael Chertoff is singled out in the report for his failure to set up an inter-agency team to secure and deploy emergency supplies and rescue teams. DHS “failed to anticipate the likely consequences . . . and procure buses, boats, and aircraft” to “evacuate the flooded city prior to Katrina’s landfall.” DHS’s utter failure in the face of “advance warning” made the committee wonder, “If this is what happens when we have advance warning, we shudder to imagine the consequences when we do not,” referring to a potential terror attack.

Upon release of the report, House Democratic Caucus chair Rep. James Clyburn (S.C.) told the media, “We have the truth but not the whole truth” (both the White House and Defense Department refused to provide documents to the committee). Democrats, anticipating a whitewash, chose not to join the Bush-initiated committee. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) scored the “practice of this Congress to cover up for the White House,” but noted that “this time it couldn’t be done”; the disaster was too great. “Even now, this Administration sits negligently by, while people suffer,” charged Hoyer, as he renewed Democrats’ call for an independent Katrina commission.

Admitting that the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA’s) failures were largely due to its having been put under DHS, Republican members called for it to be re-established as an independent agency.

Yet, even as Democrats and Republicans were scoring the Administration for its failures—from blatantly incompetent FEMA head Michael Brown, to arrogant administrator Chertoff—they all ignored the source of the policy which led to the disaster: Cheney.

It was Cheney who insisted that the previously operational FEMA be submerged into the DHS, where it was basically dismantled both through replacing of competent staff, and being deprived of money. Cheney’s so-called reorganization of counter-terrorism resulted in the destruction of disaster preparedness, and that, coming on top of the decades of stripping of vital anti-flood infrastructure projects, ensured the Katrina disaster.

Bipartisan cooperation was also on display on Feb. 14,

when the House Committee on Government Reform’s Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, held a hearing on national security whistleblowers post-9/11. The hearing, which was chaired by Christopher Shays (R-Conn.), featured testimony from a number of whistleblowers about Administration criminal policies, such as torture, illegal surveillance, and the like. The ostensible subject was the need to extend protection to whistleblowers in national security areas of the government.

Exemplary of the shocking testimony was that from Sgt. Sam Provance, who was an intelligence specialist at Abu Ghraib prison. He described how the group of Military Intelligence (MI) soldiers that came from (Guantanamo) were in conflict with the MI teams already there. They introduced a new regimen that involved the use of dogs, nakedness and sexual humiliation, sleep deprivation, beatings, and other brutality. They used the detainees’ faith in Islam to try and break them. He said that after the first set of Abu Ghraib photos came out, there was an effort to exclude the MI people from the investigations, and that Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld appeared to be setting up low-level MPs to be scapegoated, and to deny that what happened at Abu Ghraib was the result of policies and decisions by himself and others high in the chain of command. He said that the investigations and prosecutions seemed focussed on shutting off the responsibility of those up the chain of command. He was pressured to change his story, and lost his security clearance after he spoke out.

While Democrats and Republicans expressed their sympathy with him, and others, what good is that going to do? Every one of them knows that Cheney developed, and insists upon, the torture policy. Does anyone think that this policy is going to change, because there is new legal protection for whistleblowers?

## Will They Back Off?

Alongside these hearings, where the Congressmen talk tough, there are signs that the threats coming from the Administration are also taking their toll. This is clearly the case on the matter of the Patriot Act, which, after a few very slight changes, is apparently going to be accepted by virtually every one of its previous opponents, except Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.). It was a filibuster threat by Republicans and Democrats which forced the Administration into a holding pattern over the year-end.

The Administration threat, of course, is that those who oppose such “national security” measures are effectively agents of al-Qaeda. A similar tack is being used on the question of the NSA eavesdropping, and there are clear indications that some Congressional leaders, including Democrats, are backing down and set to endorse the program, as long as they are “briefed” or “consulted.”

The only alternative course would be for the opponents of such lawlessness to stand firm, and insist that the source of this lawlessness, Cheney, be removed.