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Wexler Calls for Cheney's Impeachment

by John Bresnahan

WASHINGTON - Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) is urging the House Judiciary Committee to begin impeachment hearings against Vice President Dick Cheney, despite opposition from House Democratic leaders.

"In this time, at this moment, Congress must stand for truth," Wexler said in a speech on the House floor Monday night. "A growing chorus of Americans is calling for accountability. The response from Congress thus far has been silence and denial."

Wexler's speech was met by applause from spectators in the House gallery, resulting in a warning to them to be quiet.

Wexler, who first gained national attention for defending former President Bill Clinton during his impeachment in 1998, said Cheney has to be ousted in order to restore the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches, which in his view, has been eroded by an ever-expanding claim of authority under Cheney and President Bush.

"There's a litany of issues that need to be heard," Wexler said in an interview earlier in the day. "This administration has abused the power of executive privilege. This administration has completely avoided testifying before Congress on any one of a host of six, seven, eight issues."

"Whether we are talking about the manipulation of intelligence on Iraq," he went on, "whether we are talking about the outing of a covert CIA agent, whether we're talking about the illegal use of torture, whether we're talking about the potentially unlawful firing of U.S. prosecutors - on all of these issues, the administration has thus far successfully used the power of executive privilege."

But impeachment hearings would be different, Wexler said, since the White House could not raise a privilege claim in order to avoid answering questions from lawmakers.

"In an impeachment hearing, the administration does not have the power of executive privilege," Wexler said, noting that the secret tapes that helped bring down President Richard Nixon did not surface until the House Judiciary Committee began impeachment hearings.

At the Republican National Committee, press secretary Alex Conant dismissed Wexler's impeachment call as a "publicity stunt."

"Wexler is a partisan bomb-thrower hoping to earn points with the far Left," Conant said. "His absurd calls for impeachment hearings are little more than a vain attempt to make himself relevant."

The House voted on Nov. 6 on a resolution by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) to bring articles of impeachment against Cheney for pushing for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, repeatedly suggesting that there ties between al Qaeda and the late Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and advocating military action to overthrow Iran.

When Republicans, in a bid to embarrass House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other Democratic leaders, voted for the measure, the House was thrown into a brief deadlock. The measure was eventually approved and sent to the Judiciary Committee, where Chairman John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) has declined to take action, despite pressure from Wexler and liberal activists outside Congress.

Wexler has created a website (wexlerwantshearings.com) and plans to enter into the Congressional Record the names of Americans who support impeachment hearings on Cheney.

“I was overwhelmed with the response,” Wexler said of his website. “188,000 people from all 50 states have signed a petition demanding that Congress have hearings regarding the impeachment of the vice president. I am going to present those petitions, those online petitions, to the Congress.” Wexler said he would enter into the Congressional Record the maximum number of names each day over the next few month until every person’s name is recorded.

Impeaching Cheney, or forcing him to step down, remains a cherished goal for many liberal activists, despite the fact that the Bush administration has only a year left in office. Former Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), the Democratic presidential nominee defeated by Nixon in 1972, recently issued a public call for the impeachment of both Bush and Cheney.

“Bush and Cheney are guilty of numerous impeachable offenses,” McGovern wrote in a recent op-ed in The Washington Post. “They have repeatedly violated the Constitution. They have transgressed national and international law. They have lied to the American public time after time. They conduct and barbaric policies have reduced our beloved country to a historic low in the eyes of the people of the world. These are truly ‘high crimes and misdemeanors,’ to use the constitutional standard.”

Wexler argues that the length of time left for the Bush administration in office should have no bearing on any decision to go through with impeachment hearings on Cheney.

“The truth does not have a timeline. Even if it was only for history’s sake,” Wexler said. “As a result of the abuses of power of this administration, we have now today an imbalance of power between the Congress and the president. The executive [branch] has usurped too much of the legislative branch’s power. And one of the powers of the legislature to check a run amok executive is the power of impeachment. That power, in my mind, needs to be exercised, whether it’s the first year of an administration or the last year.”