

(including FISA) on the president's powers during the time that he served in the Ford White House and as a minority member of a Democratic Congress. Despite rumors of a decline in his standing with Bush, Cheney remains the most powerful vice-president in American history, with an octopus-like reach into many parts of the government. He has placed his own people in each of the national security agencies—the Departments of Defense and State as well as the CIA and the National Security Council. (Until she recently took a maternity leave, his daughter Elizabeth was principal deputy assistant secretary of state for the Near East, a position that does not require Senate confirmation and from which people on Capitol Hill saw her as effectively in charge of the State Department's Middle East bureau.) Cheney installed Porter Goss in the CIA, with orders to root out people who leaked information inconvenient to the administration. It's difficult, however, to know much about what Cheney is doing because his office operates in such secrecy that a reporter friend of mine refers to it as a "black hole."

In Bush, Cheney has had a very receptive listener. Bush's own overweening attitude toward the presidency is clear from his behavior. He bristles at being challenged. He told Bob Woodward, "I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel I owe anybody an explanation." His comment, "I'm the decider," about not firing Rumsfeld, is in fact a phrase he has used often.

Why have the members of Congress been so timorous in the face of the steady encroachment on their constitutional power by the executive branch? Conversations with many people in or close to Congress produced several reasons. Most members of Congress don't think in broad constitutional terms; their chief preoccupations are raising money and getting reelected. Their conversations with their constituents are about the more practical issues on voters' minds: the prices of gasoline, prescription drugs, and college tuition. Or about voters' increasing discontent with the Iraq war.

Republicans know that the President's deepening unpopularity might hurt them in the autumn elections; but, they point out, he's still a good fund-raiser and they need his help. Moreover, the Republicans are more hierarchical than the Democrats, more reverential toward their own party's president; it's unimaginable that Republicans would be as openly critical of Bush as the Democrats were of Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Republicans are more disciplined about delivering their party's "talking points" to the public. Republican fund-raising is done more from the top than is the case with Democrats, and there's always the implicit threat that if a Republican isn't loyal to the president, the flow of money to their campaigns might be cut off. A Republican opponent can challenge an incumbent in a primary, in which not many people vote. Here Arlen Specter has shown unusual courage. He barely survived a conservative challenge in the primary election in 2004 (though Bush supported him), and then had to beat back a conservative attempt to remove him as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee because of his views in favor of abortion rights. He survived by promising not to let his pro-choice views hold up the judicial nominations before the committee. Specter told me, "What I worry about most is the restrictions of Congress's constitutional authority, which the Congress doesn't resist."

Bush's declining popularity can occasionally impel Republicans to try to seem independent of him—as, say, on the issue of

Dubai being awarded a contract to administer U.S. ports; after all the administration's talk about security, this arrangement sounded outrageous in the American heartland, and members of Congress rushed to kill it. But the Republican legislators have also become convinced, in the words of one Republican senator, "We've got to hang with the president because if you start splitting with him or say the president has been abusing power we'll all go down." Karl Rove has recently been arguing along these lines to congressional Republicans. In the end, a Republican lobbyist told me, Republican politicians feel that Bush is "still their guy." The fierce partisanship on Capitol Hill also blocks serious discussion of the issue of unlimited executive power: many Republicans have concluded that the Democrats are exploiting such issues for partisan purposes and have dug in against them. On May 11, at a regular weekly luncheon of about twenty conservative senators, Senator Roberts denounced criticism of Bush's surveillance and data-collecting programs as "dangerous" and "insulting" to the President and charged the Democrats with treating national security as a political issue. Members of Congress who are protective of their institution and capable of looking beyond their parochial concerns—and who might have objected to Bush's encroachments on the legislative branch—are largely gone.

From the time of the vote on the Iraq war, many Democrats have been reluctant to be caught on the "wrong side" of "national security" issues, even those blatantly cooked up by the White House. It usually requires a strong public reaction, as there was on the subject of torture, for Congress to make a move against the President's actions. A Republican senator told me, "There's a feeling on the Hill that the public doesn't care about it, that it's willing to give up liberties in order to defeat the terrorists." Some of the proposals offered on Capitol Hill for regulating the NSA wiretaps amount to little regulation at all.

At the center of the current conflict over the Constitution is a president who surrounds himself with proven loyalists, who is not interested in complexities, and who is averse to debate and intolerant of dissenters within his administration and elsewhere. (A prominent Washington Republican who had raised a lot of money for Bush was dropped from the Christmas party list after he said something mildly critical of the President.) A Republican lobbyist close to the White House described to me what he called the Cult of Bush: "This group is all about loyalty and the definition of loyalty extends to policy-making, politics, and to the execution of policy—and to the regulatory agencies." The result, this man said, is that the people in the agencies, including the regulatory agencies, "become robotrons and just do what they're told. There's no dialogue."

The President's recent political weakness hasn't caused the White House to back away from its claims of extraordinary presidential power. The Republican lobbyist Vin Weber says, "I think they're keenly aware of the fact that they're politically weakened, but that's not the same thing as the institution of the presidency being damaged." People with very disparate political views, such as Grover Norquist and Dianne Feinstein, worry about the long-term implications of Bush's power grab. Norquist said, "These are all the powers that you don't want Hillary Clinton to have." Feinstein says, "I think it's very dangerous because other presidents will come along and this sets a precedent for them." Therefore, she says, "it's very important that Congress grapple with and make decisions about what our policies should be on torture, rendition, detainees, and wire-

tapping lest Bush's claimed right to set the policies, or his policies themselves, become a precedent for future presidents."

James Madison wrote in Federalist Paper No. 47: "The accumulation of all powers legislative, executive and judiciary in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many . . . may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."

That extraordinary powers have, under Bush, been accumulated in the "same hands" is now undeniable. For the first time in more than thirty years, and to a greater extent than even then, our constitutional form of government is in jeopardy.

TRIBUTE TO LIZ COVENTRY

HON. SCOTT GARRETT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, it is with a great sense of pride and with an overwhelming sense of sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to the lifelong career of public service of Liz Coventry.

Liz has been a loyal supporter, advisor, friend, and confidante for nearly a decade. Throughout my years in the New Jersey State Legislature and my tenure in Congress, Liz has been an integral part of the team that I depend upon and my constituents look to for assistance and guidance. There is no job too big for Liz's breadth of expertise and knowledge—she can accomplish any task before her. And, there is no job too small for Liz—she is a true team player, pitching in whenever she can and wherever she is needed.

In her capacity on my Congressional staff, Liz has been a great help to countless constituents. She truly takes each individual case to heart. No one who sits with Liz at her desk ever feels like a case number; she gives each person a real personal touch.

Liz has also been organizing a number of special projects for Fifth District residents, such as the art competition and a veterans history project. Her dedication to the art competition is worthy of the art patronage of the Medici Family during the Renaissance. She makes everyone of these young artists feel like Michelangelo or DaVinci. And, her commitment to the veterans history project is unparalleled. She is a one-woman USO, making every veteran she speaks with feel like the marines at Iwo Jima.

Liz has recently decided to take a well-deserved retirement after years in selfless public service. I know that my whole staff, my constituents, and I will miss her dearly, but we wish her the very best as she takes this grand step.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO RUEDY EDGINGTON

HON. JON C. PORTER

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mr. Ruedy Edgington as he leaves the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT).

Ruedy has been at the NDOT for 26 years. He has accepted a position as Parson Transportation Group's Area Manager. In his new

role as Area Manager, Ruedy will manage over 50 Parson's employees in Northern and Southern Nevada and will oversee the road and highway projects in Nevada, Utah, and Idaho.

Upon graduation from the University of Nevada, Reno in 1981, Ruedy began work for NDOT's Bridge Section where he worked for nine years. He then moved on to a position as the Assistant Materials Engineer to gain more experience in the field. In 1998, Ruedy was promoted to the position of chief construction engineer. He was again promoted in 1999 to become the assistant director for operations, and in 2004, Ruedy became the Assistant Director for Engineering. After serving NDOT for over 25 years, Ruedy is apprehensive about his career change, but he is looking forward to the new challenges and opportunities that await him at the Parson Transportation Group.

Over the years Ruedy has led a number of special projects including: streamlining NDOT's in-house National Environmental Policy Act process, scheduling and tracking system for NDOT's in-house projects, developing Disputer Resolution Boards, and developing the initial bridge seismic retrofit program for NDOT.

Ruedy and his family have raised funds for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and have visited my office during their efforts. Ruedy loves to run and bike, but his favorite activity is spending time with his wife, Allyson, and their sons, Eric, who is 13, and Matthew, who is 10.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize Ruedy Edgington on the floor of the House. I commend him for his tremendous efforts for the state of Nevada, as well as his efforts to fight against Juvenile Diabetes.

PLAYING POLITICS WITH IRAQ

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to submit to the record an opinion editorial from the June 26, New York Times entitled "Playing Politics with Iraq" by Bob Herbert in which the columnist alleges by giving the public what it wants, an orderly withdrawal from Iraq, the Bush administration is seeking political advantage from the conflict in Iraq, making the war part of a campaign strategy.

The post-war occupation of Iraq has not gone smoothly. This has had considerable influence on the approval rating of President Bush and the popularity of his policies. As such, the Bush Administration and Republican Congressional leadership seeks to turn the debate over the Iraq War in their favor. Their plan is to possibly reduce the number of troops in Iraq before this fall's Congressional elections, with possibly even bigger cuts before the 2008 elections. Yet even while the Bush Administration appears to be executing a withdrawal of a significant number of U.S. troops in the coming month its Republican allies in the Congress are relentlessly claiming that anyone who proposes a withdrawal of troops to be proponents of a "cut and run" appeasement. Is the President and his administration to be accused of "cut and run"?

The Bush White House and Republican Congressional leadership are playing politics

with Iraq. More than 2,500 American troops who answered the call to wage war in Iraq have already perished and thousands more are struggling with coming to terms with the emotional trauma and anguish as a result of their sacrifice. They deserve better, and we owe it to them to do better. We need to move beyond partisan politics because they only serve to deviate us from our main goal—the establishment of a safe and democratic Iraq state.

As a War veteran, I know from experience how sound policy can lessen the damaging effect a war like Iraq can have on the individual. I do not think the Iraq War should be part of any party's campaign strategy. Mr. Speaker I call upon the Republican Congressional Leadership to end this divisive practice of using the Iraq war for political gain or advantage.

[From the New York Times, June 26, 2006]

PLAYING POLITICS WITH IRAQ

(By Bob Herbert)

If hell didn't exist, we'd have to invent it. We'd need a place to send the public officials who are playing politics with the lives of the men and women sent off to fight George W. Bush's calamitous war in Iraq.

The administration and its allies have been mercilessly bashing Democrats who argued that the U.S. should begin developing a timetable for the withdrawal of American forces. Republicans stood up on the Senate floor last week, one after another, to chant like cultists from the Karl Rove playbook: We're tough. You're not. Cut-and-run. Nyah-nyah-nyah!

"Withdrawal is not an option," declared the Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, who sounded like an actor trying on personas that ranged from Barry Goldwater to General Patton. "Surrender," said the bellicose Mr. Frist, "is not a solution."

Any talk about bringing home the troops, in the Senate majority leader's view, was "dangerous, reckless and shameless."

But then on Sunday we learned that the president's own point man in Iraq, Gen. George Casey, had fashioned the very thing that ol' blood-and-guts Frist and his C-Span brigade had ranted against: a withdrawal plan.

Are Karl Rove and his liege lord, the bait-and-switch king, trying to have it both ways? You bet. And that ought to be a crime, because there are real lives at stake.

The first significant cut under General Casey's plan, according to an article by Michael Gordon in yesterday's Times, would occur in September. That, of course, would be perfect timing for Republicans campaigning for reelection in November. How's that for a coincidence?

As Mr. Gordon wrote: "If executed, the plan could have considerable political significance. The first reductions would take place before this fall's Congressional elections, while even bigger cuts might come before the 2008 presidential election."

The general's proposal does not call for a complete withdrawal of American troops, and it makes clear that any withdrawals are contingent on progress in the war (which is going horribly at the moment) and improvements in the quality of the fledgling Iraqi government and its security forces.

The one thing you can be sure of is that the administration will milk as much political advantage as it can from this vague and open-ended proposal. If the election is looking ugly for the G.O.P., a certain number of troops will find themselves waking up state-side instead of in the desert in September and October.

I wonder whether Americans will ever become fed up with the loathsome politicking,

the fear-mongering, the dissembling and the gruesome incompetence of this crowd. From the Bush-Rove perspective, General Casey's plan is not a serious strategic proposal. It's a straw in the political wind.

How many casualties will be enough? More than 2,500 American troops who dutifully answered President Bush's call to wage war in Iraq have already perished, and thousands more are struggling in agony with bodies that have been torn or blown apart and psyches that have been permanently wounded.

Has the war been worth their sacrifice?

How many still have to die before we reach a consensus that we've overpaid for Mr. Bush's mad adventure? Will 5,000 American deaths be enough? Ten thousand?

The killing continued unabated last week. Iraq is a sinkhole of destruction, and if Americans could see it close up, the way we saw New Orleans in the immediate aftermath of Katrina, they would be stupefied.

Americans need to understand that Mr. Bush's invasion of Iraq was a strategic blunder of the highest magnitude. It has resulted in mind-boggling levels of bloodshed, chaos and misery in Iraq, and it certainly hasn't made the U.S. any safer.

We've had enough clownish debates on the Senate floor and elsewhere. We've had enough muscle-flexing in the White House and on Capitol Hill by guys who ran and hid when they were young and their country was at war. And it's time to stop using generals and their forces under fire in the field for cheap partisan political purposes.

The question that needs to be answered, honestly and urgently (and without regard to partisan politics), is how best to extricate overstretched American troops—some of them serving their third or fourth tours—from the flaming quicksand of an unwinnable war.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO JOSHUA MARC DAVIDSON

HON. THOMAS G. TANCREDO

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 29, 2006

Mr. TANCREDO. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate a young man from Greenwood Village, Colorado, Mr. Joshua Marc Jacobson, for earning a Congressional Award Gold Medal.

The Congressional Award program challenges talented young men and women to be active in their communities, develop leadership skills, and challenge themselves physically and to go on expeditions domestically or internationally.

Josh completed over 400 hours of community service with the most rewarding project being a food drive that he organized as the chapter president of Future Business Leaders of America. His personal development goals were achieved through part-time work with local businesses. Here he was able to develop skills in leadership that he will be taking with him as an intern for a Congressional Campaign this summer. Josh completed his physical fitness requirements by playing varsity tennis in high school, after years of hard work to achieve his goal.

Josh's commitment to his community and his desire to become a future leader is significant as he continues to grow this summer and in the years ahead.