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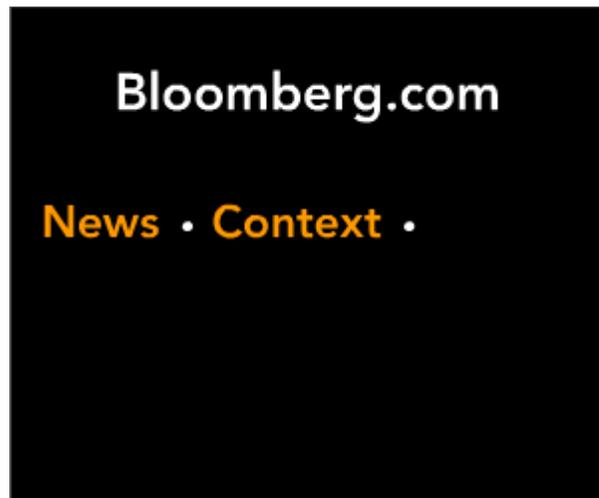


GOP turns impeachment resolution against Dems

By Jonathan E. Kaplan
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House Republicans on Tuesday nearly forced Democratic leaders to vote on a resolution to impeach Vice President Cheney.

Anti-war presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) introduced a privileged resolution, used to circumvent the committee process, to get his impeachment measure to the House floor.



The vote to kill Kucinich's privileged resolution began as a largely party-line affair, but halfway through the vote, Rep. John Shadegg (R-Ariz.) persuaded Republican leaders to get rank-and-file GOP lawmakers to change their votes to force the debate.

At one point, the vote to table the motion stood at 246-165. Once Republicans began switching their votes, momentum swung the other way. When the vote stood at 205-206, some Democrats began switching their votes.

The vote to kill Kucinich's resolution finally failed 162-251, giving Republicans the opportunity to watch Democrats debate whether to impeach Cheney — a debate in which many liberal Democrats were more than willing to engage.

House Republicans clearly enjoyed watching Democratic leaders squirm during the series of votes, which lasted more than one hour.

"The determination was made that if Democrats are going to waste time and resources with a resolution like this, then it should be thoroughly debated," said Brian Kennedy, the spokesman for Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio), adding that the charges against Cheney were "ludicrous."

Nadeam Elshami, a spokesman for Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), accused Republicans of "wasting time."

"They're voting to impeach the vice president. What does that say about the support for President Bush in the Republican Conference?" he added, trying to put the best face on a situation Democratic leaders had wanted to avoid.

What happened next exposed the ideological fissures in the Democratic Caucus. Kucinich stared down Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), who has been critical of the war but does not want to get bogged down in a political impeachment quagmire. Pelosi has taken the same stance.

Hoyer and Democratic leaders succeeded by a 218-194 vote to get a majority of Democrats to stop further debate. The House then voted by the same margin to send Kucinich's resolution to the House Judiciary Committee, where it will be left to languish and die.

Since taking power, Hoyer and Pelosi have said that impeachment is "off the table." He told reporters on Tuesday that he expected Kucinich's resolution would fail when it reached the House floor, but prediction did not pan out.

“This administration has approximately 12 months to 14 months to go. We have some major priorities. We believe that we need to pursue those policies and focus on those policies,” Hoyer said.

In a separate statement, Hoyer called the debate “a continuation of Republicans’ gotcha games that achieve nothing more than short-term entertainment for themselves, while showing their disdain for the importance of the people’s business.”

Added Hoyer: “This episode has served to demonstrate once again the absence of a real Republican agenda for the American people.”

“Democrats don’t want to imitate the Republican effort to impeach Bill Clinton,” said University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato. “It backfired then and it would backfire now. The term has got a year to run. What’s the point?”

Mike Soraghan contributed to this report.

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