

Presidents Gaining Power

Michael Kleen

Daily Eastern News

February 20, 2007

In a December 2000 meeting with congressional leaders, president-elect George W. Bush remarked, "if this were a dictatorship, it'd be a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I'm the dictator." Fortunately for us, we do not yet have a dictator for an executive, but that line has progressively blurred over the past few decades.

Since the Constitution was enacted as the supreme law of the land, the power of the president has grown exponentially. This expansion of power has been variously justified by needs that were supposedly not anticipated by the framers of the constitution, but like Patrick Henry said of the constitutional convention, "I smell a rat."

In the past hundred or so years, the national legislature has gradually surrendered power to the executive branch, with a few exceptions such as the imposition of a presidential term limit in 1951. Last year, our congressmen met for less than eighty days, and then only to rubber-stamp the policies of the president and his cabal of advisors. The vast majority of disagreements were lodged along party lines. If George W. Bush had been a Democrat like Bill Clinton, I have a feeling not one objection would have been raised by the Democrats.

Since the attacks on September 11th, George W. Bush has been given free reign by both the press and congress to pursue war wherever he saw fit. On September 25, 2001, congress passed a resolution authorizing the president to "deploy military force preemptively against terrorist organizations or the States that harbor or support them, whether or not they can be linked to the specific terrorist incidents of September 11." Using such language, congress surrendered any right to oppose military action as long as the president painted his enemies with the word "terrorist," regardless of whether they had anything to do with the attacks on America.

Since 2001, Democratic members of congress have submitted two constitutional amendments to repeal the presidential term limit. In bill after bill, President Bush has used so-called 'signing statements' to declare that he has the right to ignore the laws passed by congress, and his Attorney Generals have worked tirelessly to insulate him from the judicial branch.

Only now are some members of the legislature waking up to realize they have rendered themselves impotent. I am afraid their efforts of reform will be too little too late, but there is always hope.

The President of the United States is not infallible, nor should he or she be the "sole decision maker." Be very careful about who you support in the next presidential election, because they will wield unprecedented power once in office. Make sure you are electing the president of a republic and not the dictator of an empire.