

Congress, White House in struggle for power

By James Kuhnnehn
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WASHINGTON (KRT) — The Bush White House provoked a major lawsuit and is angering even its political allies in a campaign to increase its control over federal spending and public information.

At stake are public access to White House deliberations, the fate of federal projects in communities across America, and the ever-shifting balance of power between Congress and the presidency.

Last week, the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, sued Vice President Dick Cheney to learn who participated in meetings he chaired while formulating the administration's energy policy.

The suit was the latest move in

a series of clashes that illustrate the administration's determination to reverse what it believes is a decades-long erosion of presidential authority.

Congress is fighting back on other fronts as well.

Some influential lawmakers, including senior Republicans, are bristling at efforts by the White House Office of Management and Budget to limit spending on projects in their home districts. And when the White House rejected a request by Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind., for Justice Department documents on organized crime dating to 1967, Burton threatened to hold President Bush in contempt of Congress.

Power struggles between Congress and the White House date to the nation's founders. But the

current quarrels are distinguished by the administration's unyielding stance and the bipartisan furor it has aroused.

They are especially noteworthy given a president who promised an administration characterized by openness and affability.

"It's hard to be an open populist when you're trying to protect presidential power," said Marshall Wittmann, a Republican strategist and fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative policy research center.

But for Cheney and Bush, fortifying the presidency is as much a policy goal as cutting taxes and building up the nation's defenses.

"One of the things that I feel an obligation on, and I know the president does, too ... is to pass on our offices in better shape than we found them," Cheney said recently on ABC's "This Week." "We are weaker today as an institution because of the unwise compromises that have been made over the last 30 or 35 years."

That view has brought the GAO lawsuit and the thundering contempt-of-Congress threat from Burton, the chairman of the House Government Reform Committee.

It has also led to a confrontation over what many lawmakers maintain is their fundamental right under the Constitution — the power to decide how to spend taxpayers' money.

The White House and its budget office are out to limit Congress' practice of adding to spending legislation special projects for the folks back home.

Upon delivering the budget to Congress earlier this month, White House Budget Director Mitchell Daniels declared that such spending "has gotten out of hand." The administration took a swipe at Congress in the budget document, singling out an \$80,000 grant to a Wisconsin

county sheriff's department for the purchase of an Ice Angel Windsled, used for winter rescues on frozen Lake Superior.

It was no coincidence that the Republican Bush administration zeroed in on a project championed by the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, Wisconsin's David Obey. Obey was furious.

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Gary Bass
executive director, OMB Watch

But Daniels had angered Republicans, too. To make up for a shortfall in a federal education program, he wanted to eliminate hundreds of health and education projects that members inserted into spending legislation last year.

Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young, R-Fla., fumed.

"All wisdom on the allocation of federal grant funding does not reside in the executive branch," he wrote Daniels on Feb. 6. "Unless the Constitution is amended, Congress will continue to exercise its discretion over federal funds and will earmark those funds for purposes we deem appropriate."

National moods, scandals and the personalities of the individuals occupying the White House have dictated the power swings

from White House to Congress over the years. Congress was at its peak of power in the post-Water-gate period.

"As time has passed, it has swung back to the executive," said Gary Bass, executive director of OMB Watch, a research group that advocates openness in government. "And this administration has put much greater stock in protecting executive turf."

In the end, the Bush White House may not win all these confrontations. But by drawing a line across Pennsylvania Avenue and daring Congress to cross it, Bush and Cheney have done more to assert presidential power than previous administrations.


But the White House faces significant political risks. The public may be more likely to believe that a president is hiding something rather than protecting a constitutional principle.

Among the energy industry executives who advised Cheney last year was Kenneth Lay, then Enron Corp. chairman, and a major fund-raiser for Bush's presidential campaign. By fighting the GAO, the White House gives fuel to critics who say that Cheney, a former energy company executive himself, was drafting a policy to benefit the administration's industry friends.

Others say that Enron and energy policy aside, a successful White House stand could dramatically alter how Congress performs its job as a check on the executive branch.

"This could have huge, huge policy implications," said Bass of OMB Watch. "I do believe that Cheney and the White House are pursuing a principled issue on the energy task force. ... This is beyond Enron and the work of the Cheney task force. This is an issue about executive power."

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APASU

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Big Brother Jeff Boyce is Filipino American. He said he grew up in a "white world" and didn't learn to respect his culture until last summer when he traveled to Hawaii and became close to the families of his Hawaiian friends. He hopes the program will help children be proud of their cultures at a younger age.

"I want them to be aware of their culture so they can respect it and love it for their whole lives," he said.

At Saturday's event, the children were initially shy and clung to their mothers' legs. But soon they were attempting to dance to Hukilau with Boyce, Miller and the other big brothers and sisters.

Jane Williams and her 4-year-old Chinese daughter, Maya, attend the Big Brother/Big Sister events and are part of other support groups such as Families with Children from China and a moms and girls group for girls who've been adopted.

"(My husband) and I were interested in any opportunity to expose Maya to her culture and to other kids who've been adopted," Williams said.

She hopes the contact will help Maya deal with identity issues when she's older.

Williams and her husband wanted to adopt a baby girl from China because of the Chinese government's policy that a family can only have one child. She knew Chinese preferred to have boys, and there were a lot of little girls in orphanages. The couple adopt-

ed Maya when she was just over a year old. Now Maya is four and occasionally has questions about her background.

"When she was about two-and-a-half, she started noticing pregnant women's tummies. At about three, she said, 'I came out of your tummy, right?' I thought, 'Oh, I wish I'd been prepared for that,'" Williams said. "I think there are different levels of understanding. She knows about her birth mother and that her birth mother couldn't take care of her."

Miller doesn't remember a serious talk about her adoption with her parents.

She said she doesn't think of her family as different from anyone else's, even though she has an Indian sister, a Korean brother and Caucasian parents. She said she remembers reading books as a child describing "white" and "black" people, and she always pictured the skin colors literally.

"I said to my mom, 'I want to see a white person.' My mom said she was considered 'white' and that confused me," she said.

Miller said her mom asked her what color she wanted to be identified as.

"I guess I'm beige," she answered.

People often ask Miller where she's from. "I'll say, 'Lake Oswego,'" Miller said. "Then they'll ask, 'Well, where are your parents from?' 'Montana.' 'Well, your grandparents, then?' 'Germany.' Then they'd get really confused."

She said Americans have a fascination with asking Asians about

their ethnicity.

"I don't know why it matters so much," she said.

Since coming to the University, Miller began reconnecting with her Korean identity. Her high school had only 20 Asian students and she didn't have many Asian friends, she said. She said her parents were somewhat baffled when she went to the APASU open house and began replacing her middle name "Marie" with her Korean name, "Ji Sun." Although her adoption agency, Holt International Children's Services, gave her the name for "identification purposes," to Miller, using her Korean name is "a way of going back to the identity I first had," she said.

In APASU, she's found a group of Asian students she can relate to — whether it's just hanging out or sharing similar instances of racism and discrimination, she said. But she still finds herself somewhat detached from her Korean identity, she said.

"In this country I don't have much in common with students from Korea — with the language, culture and traditions."

The Big Brother/Big Sister program is an outlet for younger versions of Miller to deal with the same kinds of identity issues she has faced.

It's also a place for the children to learn about each other's traditions and cultures with older role models in an "environment where they're not a minority," Miller said.

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