

# Congress resists Bush's drive for power

**James Kuhnenn**  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Consumed by waging war, the Bush administration is increasingly giving the Republican-controlled Congress the back of its hand, acting as if the legislative branch were a constitutionally mandated annoyance.

Administration officials have abruptly canceled appearances before congressional committees and refused lawmakers' requests for information. Now President George W. Bush wants to sidestep congressional oversight of how he spends nearly \$75 billion that he is seeking for the war and homeland security.

"Nice try," scoffed Rep. Mark Steven Kirk, R-Ill., during a hearing on the spending plan. "There are a lot of precedents we don't want to accept here."

Since the beginning of his presidency, Bush and his team have

worked hard to reinvigorate the executive branch of government. But increasingly, with the United States fighting wars against terror and Iraq, Bush is seeking even broader authority to act without answering to legislative scrutiny. The administration says it needs "flexibility" to spend much of the money — meaning it wants to be free to spend it any way it wants without having to ask Congress first.

Congress is beginning to push back.

Legislative committees could put their stamp on how the \$75 billion is spent as early as Tuesday. Republicans and Democrats have already made clear that they intend to give the president the money he wants, and perhaps more. But they want to rein in the president's drive for expanded authority.

"I don't know how that flexibility works, but the Congress has always

balked at giving too much flexibility, because it is our responsibility to watch the purse," said House Majority Leader Tom DeLay of Texas, one of Bush's staunchest allies.

To many lawmakers, Bush's request for flexibility is only the latest example of administration disdain, if not contempt, for Congress. Time and again, Republicans and Democrats say, the Bush administration has stiff-armed lawmakers or scorned their committees.

One week before U.S. cruise missiles began falling on Baghdad, Pentagon officials turned down a Senate Foreign Relations Committee's request for top Pentagon officials to testify about reconstruction in post-war Iraq.

Instead, defense officials chose to brief journalists on that subject the same day. "No answers!" fumed Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb. "That does not encourage a great amount of trust

and cooperation."

Also on the same day, Treasury Undersecretary Peter Fisher abruptly canceled his scheduled appearance before the Senate Finance Committee, where he would have likely faced questions about rising budget deficits and the national debt.

"If I weren't a Republican, it wouldn't be so embarrassing," committee Chairman Charles Grassley said.

Bush's own condescension has irritated members of Congress. Nearly two weeks before he launched the war on Iraq, Bush referred publicly to lawmakers as "the spenders."

That "certainly encourages warm feelings," Hagel said sarcastically.

It's to be expected that Democrats would complain about treatment by the Republican White House. What's noteworthy, however, is that such criticism now comes

from many Republicans in Congress, including some who vote regularly with the president. By skipping the Foreign Relations Committee hearing, for example, the administration got crosswise with Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., the panel's chairman and an influential player on international issues.

"There's a strain of arrogance in all of this," said one Republican senator, on the condition of anonymity. "They need to do a better job."

Grover Norquist, a conservative activist with close ties to the White House, said lawmakers have a point. "There is a sense that the White House has to understand that they are co-equal branches of government."

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## War correspondents face penalties for coverage

**Tom Jicha**  
South Florida Sun-Sentinel (KRT)

Journalists' mistakes put their jobs at risk. Loose lips not only sink ships during wartime, they can torpedo a career.

Two of TV's most recognizable and controversial figures, Peter Arnett and Geraldo Rivera, found this out over the weekend.

Arnett was fired Monday from his job covering the war for NBC and MSNBC after he expressed negative opinions about U.S. conduct of the conflict on state-run Iraqi TV. Rivera was threatened with expulsion from Iraq by the U.S. military for being too specific about the location and

battle plans of the 101st Airborne troops, with whom he was traveling.

It was first reported that Rivera had been expelled, but Fox disputed this. On his evening newscast on Fox, Brit Hume said, "His further assignment has not been determined."

Arnett, an acclaimed war correspondent, was technically working for National Geographic on MSNBC, and freelancing for NBC and its sister cable network. However, when NBC reacted to criticism of Arnett by announcing it would no longer use him, he also lost his job with National Geographic. He was subsequently hired by Britain's Daily Mirror.

Unlike Rivera, who spoke with-

out thinking, thereby putting the lives of troops and himself in jeopardy, Arnett was punished for being too analytical. The First Amendment doesn't apply to employee-employer situations.

The Arnett firestorm erupted after he opined on Iraqi TV that the United States' war strategy is a failure and needs to be revised. "Clearly, the American war planners misjudged the determination of the Iraqi forces."

Appearing from Baghdad on Monday's "Today" show on NBC, he acknowledged he had made a mistake. "I want to apologize to the American people for clearly mak-

ing a misjudgment."

In a prepared statement, NBC said, "It was wrong for Mr. Arnett to grant an interview to state-controlled Iraqi TV, especially at a time of war. And it was wrong for him to discuss his personal observations and opinions in the interview."

Given Rivera's history when it comes to time and place, it's questionable why the Army would be upset with him. While reporting from Afghanistan two years ago, Rivera told Fox News Channel viewers he was standing on "hallowed ground," where the day before three Green Beret soldiers had been killed. It was subsequently found Rivera was

standing about 300 miles from the hallowed ground.

Trying to recoup, Rivera, whose colorful style is marked by his penchant to make any story all about him, said he had confused the Green Beret deaths with a similar incident. The problem was that similar incident took place three days after his dispatch. Fox News Channel called it an honest mistake.

Having Rivera working for you means often having to say you're sorry.

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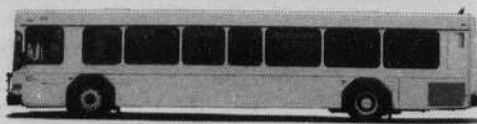


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