
A Sublime Moment

The Jan. 6 debate in the House of Representatives challenging the Presidential election, stunned Washington observers.

The floor of the House of Representatives has been the scene of much political debate throughout the years, some of it profound, some merely useful, and a lot of it purely hot air. But on Jan. 6, at a Joint Session of Congress called to authenticate the certificates of the Electoral College from the 2004 Presidential election, there suddenly occurred a moment that approached the sublime, when an array of Democratic Congressman, led by the indomitable Ohio representative, Stephanie Tubbs Jones, stood up to object to the certification of the count of the Presidential votes in Ohio.

The counting abruptly stopped. "For what purposes does the gentlewoman from Ohio rise?" Vice President Dick Cheney asked. "Mr. Vice President, I seek to object to the electoral votes of the State of Ohio on the ground that they were not, under all of the known circumstances, regularly given and have a signed objection, and I do have a Senator," Tubbs Jones replied. She then stepped up to the Speaker's table to hand the Vice President the resolution of objection, signed by herself and by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) At that, Cheney was impelled by the rules of the House to adjourn the Joint Session. Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) had then to call the House back into session to discuss for two hours the objection raised by the Ohio Congresswoman.

The Senators gathered there for the vote along with Vice President Cheney, who had so arrogantly marched into the House of Representatives for the ballot-counting, had now to march back out again, with

Senators going to their own chamber in order to debate that same resolution of objection.

The resolution came as no surprise to the Republican side, nor to the Vice President, who, according to reports, had, the day before, when it became known that the resolution would have the signature of a Democratic Senator, thus triggering the debate, argued to override the objection and simply proceed with the count. Lawyers in the room cautioned him that this would indeed have serious legal repercussions which they advised against. So when the Vice President handed the Ohio ballot to one of the tellers to read off the results, knowing that an objection would follow, he did so with a bit of a smirk. Had the motion come as a surprise, however, Cheney would undoubtedly have had a hissey-fit, and besmirched the House, as he had the Senate last year, with his hallmark "F— you!" Now restricted by the rules, he was forced to curb his tongue.

What followed was a debate in which the Democratic side made an oftentimes eloquent appeal in defense of the fundamental right to vote. The case was most forcefully presented by Congresswoman Tubbs Jones, and she was followed by an array of other Congressmen. "This is not a black and white issue. This is not a Republican/Democrat issue," Rep. Elijah Cummings (Md.) said. "This is a red, white, and blue issue. This Constitution that we base our country and our laws on, the fundamental things of that Constitution, that building block, is the vote; and when we take away

that vote, then what we do is we basically are destroying our democracy. That is what this is all about."

In the two-hour debate, evenly divided up between the two sides, the Republicans who spoke were absolutely furious, calling the Ohio motion "frivolous," a "sham," and "sour grapes" from the Democrats. Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C.) responded to their tantrums. "Two days ago we took an oath of office to uphold and defend the Constitution," Watt said, "... at least three amendments in the Constitution which guarantee equal access to the ballot [were violated], and yet we are saying that people who did not get an opportunity to vote, who did not have equal access to the vote, are raising frivolous issues? Come on, give me a break."

Glancing at the two massive paintings on either side of the Speaker's podium—one, a portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, and the other a portrait of Lafayette by Samuel Morse, made on the French General's 1824 re-visit to the United States after years in prison—it seemed to me that their countenances had this day a different glow. I perceived a slight smile of contentment on the otherwise solemn visage that Stuart had given Washington, and definitely detected something of a proud gleam in the eye of Lafayette.

No wonder the rage exhibited by House Speaker Tom DeLay and his irate Republican colleagues over the motion of Congresswoman Tubbs Jones! What they were seeing was a revitalized Democratic Party, strengthened by the urgings of political leader Lyndon LaRouche, intent on fighting a battle on the basis of a fundamental principle, and to protest an injustice which strikes at the very heart of this nation. DeLay and Co. have a right to be worried. For these "victors" of 2004, the battle has just begun.