

Has Dick Cheney Gone A Bridge Too Far?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

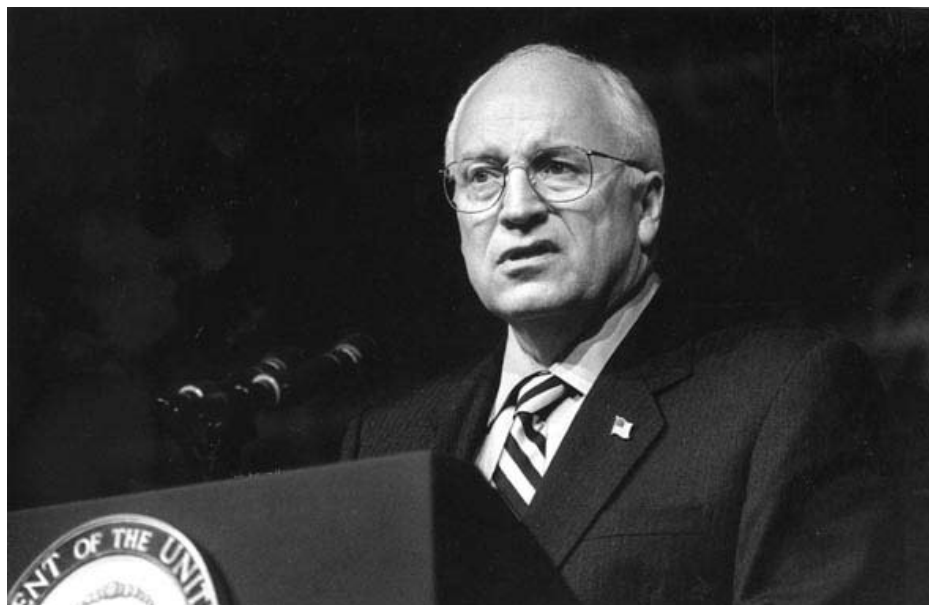
When thousands of Republicans descend on Minneapolis next Summer for the Republican Party Presidential nominating convention, they will be visually confronted with one of the many tragic consequences of the Bush-Cheney Administration's legacy of callous neglect: the remains of the I-35W bridge into the city, that collapsed on Aug. 1, plunging rush-hour commuters 60 feet into the Mississippi River below, killing and wounding an as-yet unknown number of people. In 2005, Minnesota Department of Transportation inspectors deemed the steel-truss bridge "structurally deficient," in a report to the Federal Highway Administration. By FHA standards, the bridge should have been replaced, long ago.

In the same year that the bridge was rated deficient by Minnesota authorities, the American Society of Civil Engineers published its "2005 Report Card on America's Infrastructure," which found that over 25% of the 590,750 bridges in the United States were "structurally deficient or functionally obsolete"—like the Minneapolis bridge! On Aug. 2, 2007, in a statement of condolence to those killed or wounded in the I-35W bridge collapse, the ASCE warned, "It will cost \$9.4 billion a year for 20 years to eliminate all bridge deficiencies. Long-term underinvestment is compounded by the lack of a federal transportation program." To be sure, the collapse of the nation's in-

frastructure did not begin with the January 2001 inauguration of Bush and Cheney. They just did everything in their power to make matters far, far worse.

The Minneapolis bridge collapse immediately evoked angry memories of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, which virtually wiped out New Orleans and much of the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico, at the lower end of the Mississippi River, and vividly exposed Bush and Cheney's total disregard for the well-being of the American people.

And nothing has changed at the White House since Ka-



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The collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis on Aug. 1, is yet another example of the Cheney White House's total disregard for the well-being of the American people; and another powerful reason to impeach Cheney now.

trina. As if to underscore the point, two days after the collapse of the I-35W bridge, the White House threatened to veto the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA), a bill that would invest \$21 billion in urgently needed repairs, replacements, and new construction of water projects, including levees, dams, and locks that are now in a state of total disrepair.

The same ASCE 2005 “report card” that warned of the crumbling state of America’s bridge infrastructure, reported a 33% rise in the number of dams that had become unsafe, over the seven-year period from 1998-2005. In absolute terms, the study found that a total of 3,500 dams and over half of the 257 locks, spanning 12,000 miles of vital inland waterways, were functionally obsolete.

Yet, during much of that seven-year period, the WRDA was stalled by a Bush Administration hell-bent on conducting preventive wars abroad, and delivering massive tax cuts to the super-rich at home—while the conditions of life for the lower 80% of income brackets plunged, and the nation’s physical economy, including infrastructure, collapsed to its lowest level since the Great Depression.

On Aug. 2, the House of Representatives, by an overwhelming 381-40 vote, passed the Water Resources Development Act; and the identical measure is expected to pass the Senate. The \$21 billion would fund the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct 800 projects; create hundreds of thousands of meaningful jobs; and generate orders for a very substantial bill of materials, giving life to a dying American industrial sector.

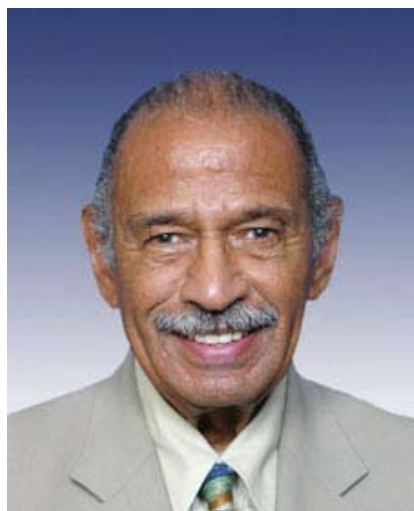
According to Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.), chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and a key booster of WRDA, “There is urgent, pent-up demand to address the Nation’s water resources needs, including restoring wetlands in Coastal Louisiana and improving hurricane protection in New Orleans.”

Bush and Cheney’s response: We don’t give a damn.

Cheney’s Wars Come First

The very day that the tragic bridge collapse occurred, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) issued an estimate that the Iraq War will ultimately cost U.S. taxpayers between \$1-1.4 trillion. Testifying on the report before the House Budget Committee on Aug. 1, CBO Assistant Director for Budget Analysis Robert Sunshine detailed the costs, including the long-term care and support for wounded soldiers, and benefits for the families of those killed. *EIR*’s own sources put the ultimate cost at closer to \$2 trillion, taking into account the replacement costs of the military equipment used in the war and occupation.

And this figure does not even consider the *next* war that Vice President Cheney is desperately promoting: a preventive war against Iran, that could kick off as early as this month, with Congress in recess until Labor Day. Despite strong and mounting opposition from the uniformed military and the in-



Rep. John Conyers, as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, would preside over the impeachment of Cheney. In a radio interview in California last month, Conyers pledged to take up the Cheney impeachment bill, H.R. 333, in the Judiciary Committee.

telligence community, Cheney is pressing President Bush to give the orders to bomb Iran, according to sources close to the White House. All that is missing at this point is a pretext to start shooting. It is for this reason that many senior military and intelligence professionals are fearful of a “Gulf of Tonkin II”: a staged or fabricated incident, to provide Cheney with the opportunity.

And the Vice President did nothing to allay those fears when he appeared on July 31 on the Larry King Live show on CNN. Asked, point blank, “Would you make an overt move on Iran,” Cheney answered with a question: “For what reason?” He then added, “No, I’m not going to speculate about prospective operations,” elaborating, “Well, I’m concerned about Iran. I think everybody is, and should be. We see a state that periodically announces their objective as the destruction of Israel, for example. Mr. Ahmadinejad, Prime Minister [sic], periodically makes very threatening statements. They are actively pursuing the development of the capacity to enrich uranium to produce nuclear weapons.” He concluded, ominously, “We’ve been working diplomatically with our friends in Europe and the EU to get them to give up those aspirations. So far they haven’t responded.”

More Help for Conyers

A significant majority of Americans, and an overwhelming majority of Democratic Party voters, believe that Cheney must be forced out of office immediately—if another war is to be avoided, and if the United States is to begin the process of national and global economic recovery.

Aug. 1 marked another milestone in the drive to force Cheney out. Reps. Donald M. Payne (D-N.J.) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.) joined a growing number of House Democrats, in signing on to H.R. 333, the bill introduced on April 24, 2007 by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), to begin impeachment proceedings against Cheney. Total sponsors now number 17.

As chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) would preside over the impeachment, serving, in effect, as the prosecutor. In a radio interview in California in July, Conyers had pledged to take up H.R. 333 in the Judiciary Committee, once three more Members of Congress signed on—despite excruciating pressure on him and others from Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to drop any thoughts of impeachment. Days before Payne and Baldwin signed on, Philadelphia Democratic Congressman Robert Brady had endorsed the Kucinich bill, thus bringing the issue to a head.

As Lyndon LaRouche eloquently warned, in his July 25 webcast, with the global financial system already collapsing, and with Cheney's backers pushing for war as the way out of the dollar crash, Cheney's removal is now a matter of survival for the United States—and that is not a partisan issue.