

Report: Bush makes 'bold' privilege claim

by UPI

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration has lodged what officials call a bold new assertion of executive authority in the controversial dismissal of nine U.S. attorneys. The White House says the Justice Department will never be permitted to pursue contempt charges brought by Congress against administration officials once President George W. Bush has invoked executive privilege in the matter, The Washington Post reported Friday. Democrats in Congress have been preparing to bring contempt proceedings against current and former White House officials in a struggle with the administration over access to information about the dismissals. Federal law requires a statutory contempt citation by the House or Senate to be submitted to the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, the newspaper said. However, administration officials said Congress lacks authority to force a U.S. attorney to pursue contempt charges when the president has asserted that testimony or documents are protected by executive privilege. A senior administration official told the Post the president's constitutional prerogatives "would make it a futile and purely political act" if Congress referred contempt citations to U.S. attorneys. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., called the assertion "an outrageous abuse of executive privilege." Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., said, "I suppose the next step would be just disbanding the Justice Department."

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