

Francisco v. House of Representatives (November 10, 2003)

Source: [Francisco, Jr., et al. v. House of Representatives, et al. \(2003\)](#)

Doctrine

The Supreme Court held that impeachment is not beyond judicial review when the Constitution itself imposes clear limits on Congress' impeachment power. In particular, the one-year bar in Article XI, Section 3(5) is enforceable by the Court, and an impeachment complaint is deemed initiated upon filing and referral to the House Committee on Justice, or upon filing by at least one-third of the House Members.

Facts

Several petitions were filed questioning the constitutionality of the second impeachment complaint against Chief Justice Hilario G. Davide, Jr. The controversy arose after the House of Representatives had earlier adopted a resolution directing the Committee on Justice to investigate, in aid of legislation, the manner of disbursement and expenditure of the Judiciary Development Fund.

On June 2, 2003, former President Joseph E. Estrada filed the first impeachment complaint against Chief Justice Davide and seven Associate Justices of the Supreme Court. The complaint was endorsed by several Members of the House and was referred to the House Committee on Justice on August 5, 2003. The Committee later found the complaint sufficient in form but dismissed it for insufficiency in substance.

Four months and three weeks after the first complaint was filed, the second impeachment complaint was lodged on October 23, 2003 by Representatives Gilberto Teodoro Jr. and Felix William Fuentebella. Unlike the first complaint, the second was accompanied by a Resolution of Endorsement/Impeachment signed by at least one-third of the Members of the House of Representatives. Petitioners claimed that the filing of the second complaint violated the constitutional prohibition against initiating impeachment proceedings against the same official more than once within a period of one year.

The petitions also assailed portions of the House's Rules of Procedure in Impeachment Proceedings, particularly Sections 16 and 17 of Rule V, which treated impeachment as initiated only upon the Committee on Justice's finding of sufficiency of substance or upon action by the House plenary. Petitioners argued that these rules distorted the constitutional meaning of "initiate" and allowed Congress to evade the one-year bar. The House and Senate were asked to comment, while various intervenors and amici curiae joined the dispute, all emphasizing the significance of the constitutional questions involved.

The Court consolidated the petitions and, in the course of the proceedings, required the parties to maintain the status quo while oral arguments were held. The House argued that impeachment was an internal and political matter beyond judicial interference, while the Senate maintained that the petitions were premature because no Articles of Impeachment had yet been transmitted to it.

Issues

W/N the Court may exercise judicial review over impeachment proceedings -> Yes

The Court held that it may review impeachment-related acts when constitutional limitations are alleged to have been violated. The Constitution's expanded definition of judicial power under Article VIII authorizes the Court

to determine whether any branch of government acted with grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction.

The Court stressed that impeachment is political in character, but not wholly insulated from judicial scrutiny. Since the Constitution expressly limits the House's impeachment power, the issue was not a pure political question but a justiciable constitutional controversy.

W/N the second impeachment complaint was barred by the one-year prohibition -> Yes

The Court ruled that the second impeachment complaint violated Article XI, Section 3(5) because the first complaint had already been initiated within the one-year period. The first complaint was initiated when it was filed and referred to the House Committee on Justice on August 5, 2003.

The Court rejected the view that impeachment is initiated only upon the Committee's finding of sufficiency of substance or upon plenary action by the House. It explained that such a reading would allow Congress to evade the constitutional one-year bar through its internal rules, which cannot amend or defeat the Constitution.

W/N the challenged provisions of the House Impeachment Rules were constitutional -> No

The Court declared Sections 16 and 17 of Rule V unconstitutional because they gave the word "initiate" a meaning inconsistent with the Constitution. The House may promulgate rules to carry out impeachment, but those rules must remain faithful to constitutional text and limits.

The Court reiterated that Congress cannot, by internal procedure, redefine a constitutional term in a way that defeats a substantive safeguard. Since the Constitution itself already fixed the one-year bar, any rule that delayed initiation beyond filing and referral was void.

Ruling of the Court

The Court granted the petitions in part and struck down Sections 16 and 17 of Rule V of the House Rules of Procedure in Impeachment Proceedings for being unconstitutional. It further held that the second impeachment complaint against Chief Justice Davide was barred by the one-year prohibition under Article XI, Section 3(5), because the first complaint had already been initiated within the previous year.

The Court emphasized that the constitutional power to initiate impeachment is not absolute and is subject to judicial review when constitutional boundaries are exceeded. It also clarified that impeachment proceedings are initiated either by the filing of a complaint and its referral to the House Committee on Justice, or by the filing of a verified complaint endorsed by at least one-third of the House Members.

The dispositive effect of the ruling was to prevent the House from proceeding on the second impeachment complaint. By invalidating the challenged House rules and enforcing the one-year bar, the Court preserved the constitutional limits on impeachment and reaffirmed that Congress' rule-making power cannot override the Constitution.