

POLITICS

Pelosi Announces Impeachment Inquiry of President Trump

President's dealings with Ukraine spur more lawmakers to back his removal

By Natalie Andrews and Andrew Duehren

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WASHINGTON—Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the House would move ahead with an “official” impeachment effort after reports that President Trump withheld aid to Ukraine while he was pressing the country to investigate Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and his son.

After months of resisting an impeachment investigation, Mrs. Pelosi said at the end of a day of meetings with House Democrats that she was directing six House committees already investigating Mr. Trump to continue their probes “under that umbrella of impeachment inquiry.”

“The actions taken to date by the president have seriously violated the Constitution,” said Mrs. Pelosi (D., Calif.), who has expressed concern about the political risks of impeachment.

Her chosen route avoids a full House floor vote on opening a probe, a step that has occurred each of the three previous times the House has launched impeachment proceedings against a president. Such a resolution would require 218 votes to pass; as of Tuesday evening, after several Democrats said they were joining the cause, there were more than 190 lawmakers who publicly supported moving forward on impeachment.

The move is a culmination of what has been a nearly yearlong debate among Democrats about how hard to push for Mr. Trump’s removal from office, particularly since they took control of the House this year. Earlier, Democrats’ focus was on Mr. Trump’s campaign ties to Russia, the subject of a special counsel report earlier this year, among other issues involving the president.

Now, some lawmakers are arguing that the Republican president using his position to pressure a foreign entity to investigate a political opponent for his own gain is an impeachable offense.

Mrs. Pelosi’s decision also represents a bet that voters, whom polls have shown to be wary of impeachment, can be persuaded once more facts emerge.

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“The dam has broken because this is a form of betrayal of his presidential oath and national security that is taking place in real time,” said Rep. Jamie Raskin (D., Md.), who supports an impeachment inquiry. “Trump’s not just a candidate now, he’s president of the United States.”

Mr. Trump, tweeting from his home in Trump Tower in New York City after his appearance at the United Nations, called the inquiry “PRESIDENTIAL HARASSMENT!”

Earlier Tuesday, Mr. Trump called the allegations a “witch hunt,” repeating a refrain that he frequently used to describe the nearly two-year-old probe of his campaign’s dealings with Russia.

Mr. Trump said he approved the Wednesday release of a transcript of a July call with new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in which he repeatedly pressed his Ukrainian counterpart for a probe of the Bidens. But Democrats are seeking the release of a full whistleblower complaint made to the inspector general of the intelligence community that includes the July phone call and has become the subject of an unusual standoff.

The White House is preparing to allow the whistleblower complaint to be turned over to Congress by the end of the week, according to a person familiar with the matter. The complaint must first be declassified, the person said.



Why Did Democrats Decide to Launch Impeachment Proceedings?



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Mrs. Pelosi’s statement came after a meeting with all Democratic House lawmakers to discuss how to handle the Ukraine matter. After the meeting, more Democrats joined the speaker in

backing an impeachment inquiry, though some members wanted to see the whistleblower report and learn more about Mr. Trump's interactions with Mr. Zelensky.

"We need the whistleblower complaint, we need to know what the whistleblower has to say," said Rep. Susan Wild (D., Pa.). "You don't just proceed to a trial without having the facts. But these are very, very serious allegations."

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D., Calif.) on Tuesday asked the whistleblower to speak to the Intelligence Committee on a voluntary basis on Thursday. He said he would arrange a format that would ensure the whistleblower's privacy.

Mrs. Pelosi has been reluctant to move toward impeachment, saying she would prefer to defeat Mr. Trump at the ballot box in 2020. She spent the weekend and Monday making calls to on-the-fence Democrats and her allies, taking the temperature on where members stood.

Reports of Mr. Trump's actions regarding Ukraine spurred Mrs. Pelosi to act. The president asked his acting chief of staff to place a hold on \$391 million in aid to Ukraine more than a week before a July phone call in which the president urged his Ukrainian counterpart to investigate Mr. Biden's son, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Mr. Trump and his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, have argued, without evidence, that the then-vice president's anticorruption push in Ukraine was designed to head off an investigation of a company for which his son, Hunter Biden, was a board member. Yuriy Lutsenko, Ukraine's prosecutor general at the time, said earlier this year he had no evidence of wrongdoing by Mr. Biden or his son.

Mr. Trump said on Tuesday that he held up aid to Ukraine over frustration with Europe's level of contributions to the country. A day earlier, he suggested there was a link between his delay of aid to Ukraine and what he said were concerns about corruption in the country.

On Capitol Hill, two significant groups backed an impeachment investigation on Monday, leading to the shift in the caucus: Democratic lawmakers in competitive districts that Mr. Trump won in 2016; and close allies of Mrs. Pelosi, who had been watching for her lead, such as Reps. Debbie Dingell of Michigan and Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut.

Prominent Rep. John Lewis (D., Ga.), long seen as a bellwether on impeachment in the House, got behind the effort Tuesday, saying that "the time to begin impeachment proceedings against this president has come."

The House Judiciary Committee will take the lead on the inquiry, said a person familiar with the matter. The panel is already investigating the president over allegations in former special counsel Robert Mueller's report that Mr. Trump obstructed justice while being investigated over

campaign links to Russia in the 2016 election. Mr. Trump has denied any obstruction or any connection to Russia.

Three House Democratic committee chairmen on Tuesday pressed their case against the White House in light of the new reports about Mr. Trump asking for a delay in aid to Ukraine. Without directly using the word “impeachment,” Mr. Schiff, along with Oversight Committee Chairman Elijah Cummings (D., Md.) and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot Engel (D., N.Y.) warned that the president’s conduct, as described in news reports, may meet standards that many Democrats see as a bar for determining that Mr. Trump had engaged in behavior that would justify his removal from office.

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“If the recent reports are accurate, it means the President raised with a foreign leader pursuing investigations related to a political opponent in an upcoming election. That is the very definition of corrupt abuse of power,” the three chairmen wrote.

The Democratic-controlled House needs a simple majority to impeach the president. If Mr. Trump is impeached in the House, the matter would move to the Republican-controlled Senate, where it would face long odds of conviction by the necessary two-thirds supermajority. No Republican senators support removing the president from office, and many have shrugged off the president’s actions concerning Ukraine.

At his regular Tuesday afternoon news conference, a reporter asked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell what he would do if there were to be articles of impeachment regarding the president sent over from the House.

“Wait a minute. What we have here is an allegation related to the Ukrainian aid by whistleblower that’s about all we know now,” Mr. McConnell said, later adding: “I’m not going to address all these various hypotheticals that have been aired out about what may or may not happen in the House. And I think all of that is quite premature.”

—*Siobhan Hughes, Rebecca Ballhaus, Ken Thomas, Jesse Naranjo, Catherine Lucey and Lindsay Wise contributed to this article.*

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