POLITICS

President Trump is impeached in a historic vote by the House, will face trial in the Senate

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KEY POINTS

- The House of Representatives votes to impeach President Donald Trump for high crimes and misdemeanors.

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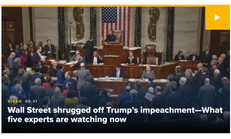

VIDEO 05:31
Wall Street shrugged off Trump's impeachment—What five experts are watching now

WASHINGTON — The House of Representatives voted Wednesday night to impeach President Donald Trump, making him only the third president to be charged with high crimes and misdemeanors and face a Senate trial that could remove him from office.

The largely party-line vote after eight hours of highly charged partisan debate represented the culmination of a sprawling three-month investigation that was conducted by multiple committees in the Democratic-controlled House and was opposed at every turn by the White House and congressional Republicans.

Following Wednesday's votes, White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham called the impeachment an "unconstitutional travesty." Trump, she said in a statement, "is confident the Senate will restore regular order, fairness, and due process," and he is prepared "for the next steps and confident that he will be fully exonerated."

VIDEO 01:47
US House votes to impeach Pres. Trump for abuse of power, obstruction of Congress

After the votes, a somber House Speaker Nancy Pelosi paid tribute to the late Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, who was among the Democratic leaders of the anti-Trump effort until his death at age 68 on Oct. 17.

"He said, "When the history books are written about this tumultuous era, I want them to show that I was among those in the House of Representatives who stood up to lawlessness and tyranny," Pelosi said. "He also said somewhat presciently, 'When we are dancing with the angels, the question will be what did you do to make sure we kept our democracy.'"

US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (C) and House Judiciary Chairman Jerry Nadler (C L) hold a press conference after the House passed Resolution 755, Articles of Impeachment Against President Donald J. Trump, at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on December 18, 2019.
Olivier Douliery | AFP | Getty Images

Article one, abuse of power, was adopted by 230 to 197, with one member voting present. Article two, obstruction of Congress, passed by 229 to 198 with one voting present. Two Democrats broke ranks and voted against impeachment on the first article.

One of them was Rep. Colin Peterson, D-Minn., who represents a district that Trump won easily in 2016 and who had faced pressure for months to oppose the impeachment. The other was New Jersey Rep. Jeff Van Drew, who is expected to switch parties and join the Republican caucus. Van Drew and Peterson had consistently voted against allowing the impeachment probe to move forward in procedural votes this fall.

A third Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Jared Golden of Maine, joined Peterson and Van Drew on Wednesday to vote against the second article of impeachment, obstruction of Congress. Golden did support passage of the first article, for abuse of power.

VIDEO 02:52
Trump just got impeached by the House—Here's what happens next

Ultimately, Trump was impeached on two specific charges: The first was that he abused his power by freezing U.S. foreign aid to Ukraine in order to pressure Ukraine's president into launching investigations into Trump's domestic political opponents. According to the first article of impeachment, Trump's actions toward Ukraine amounted to having used his office to solicit "the interference of a foreign government, Ukraine, in the 2020 United States Presidential election."

Through his conduct, the article asserts, Trump "demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national security and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office, and has acted in a manner grossly incompatible with self-governance and the rule of law."

The second article charges Trump with obstruction of Congress for demanding that top level staffers at the White House defy the lawfully issued subpoenas they received from the House Intelligence Committee, compelling them to testify in the impeachment probe.

"President Trump thus interposed the powers of the Presidency against the lawful subpoenas of the House of Representatives," the article states, and he "assumed to himself functions and judgments" that are the constitutional purview of the legislative branch, and specifically of the House.

Despite the White House's blanket directive to aides this fall not to testify, more than a dozen current and former national security officials, diplomats and career public servants ignored the president's instructions and opted to give testimony under oath.

Collectively, the officials described how Trump and his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani engaged in a months-long effort for force Ukraine to agree to actions that ran contrary to U.S. national security priorities. Instead of working in the best interests of the United States, the officials said, Trump's lieutenants were dispatched around the world to carry out what a top Russia expert at the White House called, "a domestic political errand" on the president's own behalf.

One Democrat, 2020 presidential candidate Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, Hawaii, did not vote for or against the articles of impeachment. Instead, Gabbard voted "present," a tactic that is typically used only by members who feel that voting with their party would place them at odds with their constituents. Yet polls show that Gabbard's constituents in deep blue Hawaii overwhelmingly support impeachment.

A bitter defeat

Throughout the entire impeachment inquiry process, Trump has constantly assailed and insulted the lawmakers leading the probe, the reporters covering it, and the government employees testifying in it. Trump has insisted that a July 25 phone call he had with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, in which he asked for the investigations as "a favor," was "perfect," and that the entire impeachment effort is part of a personal vendetta against him and a desire by Democrats to overthrow his 2016 election.

US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi presides over Resolution 755, Articles of Impeachment Against President Donald J. Trump as the House votes at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on December 18, 2019.
Saul Loeb | AFP | Getty Images

On Tuesday, Trump wrote a furious letter to Pelosi, calling his impeachment "an illegal, partisan attempted coup."

"You are the ones interfering in America's elections," Trump wrote in the six-page screed. "You are the ones subverting America's Democracy. You are the ones Obstructing Justice. You are the ones bringing pain and suffering to our Republic for your own selfish personal, political, and partisan gain," Trump wrote.

But it is partly because Trump was so furious, and was so personally undone by the impeachment, that Wednesday's vote marked such a bitter defeat. For a president obsessed with winning, the prospect of being forever part of the group of three U.S. presidents in the country's history who have been impeached likely represents a singular professional and personal humiliation.

Trump defiant

As the Democratic-majority House voted on Wednesday to deal Trump the sharpest blow of his political life, the president was a thousand miles away — literally. He spent Wednesday evening in the swing state of Michigan, where he held a raucous campaign rally in Battle Creek before a crowd of 10,000 adoring supporters.

President Donald Trump arrives on stage for a Keep America Great Rally at Kellogg Arena December 18, 2019, in Battle Creek, Michigan.
Brendan Smialowski | AFP | Getty Images

One of the many ways that Trump differs from most of his predecessors is that he loves campaigning. For Trump, speaking off the cuff for two hours at a massive campaign rally is one of the best perks of being president.

That these two events took place simultaneously on Wednesday was remarkable.

Together, the rally in Michigan and the impeachment vote in Washington amounted to a perfect split screen image of the Trump presidency:

While half of Americans watched the House vote to remove the president from office because they thought he posed a danger to the nation's security, the other half turned on Fox News Channel, where Trump's campaign rally was being carried live.

"It doesn't really feel like we're being impeached," Trump insisted in Michigan, while the House was voting in Washington. "The country is doing better than ever before. We did nothing wrong."

—CNBC's Marty Steinberg contributed to this report.

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