



POLITICS

# Trump's nominee for Pentagon weapons buyer was a key figure in the president's first impeachment



The Department of Defense logo is seen on the wall in the Press Briefing room at the Pentagon on, Oct. 29, 2024



BY [TARA COPP](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's nominee to be the military's top weapons buyer is an official who directed the Pentagon to [withhold aid from Ukraine in 2019](#) as Trump sought a commitment from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate the Biden family — a key component of the [impeachment of Trump](#) in his first term.

That relationship is raising questions among some senators about whether the nominee will follow the law if confirmed for a powerful new position that oversees a budget of \$311 billion.

Michael Duffey, Trump's nominee to be undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, served as the associate director at the Office of Management and Budget during Trump's first term.

In that job, he directed the Pentagon in July 2019 [to place the hold](#) on \$391 million in security assistance for Ukraine. It continued until mid-September as Trump tried to secure an announcement from Zelenskyy about investigating Trump's 2020 election rival Joe Biden and son Hunter Biden on corruption charges tied to the younger Biden's role with the Ukrainian gas company Burisma.

Withholding money for a policy reason is a violation of the [1974 Impoundment Control Act](#), which prohibits the executive branch from freezing funds appropriated by Congress, the branch controlling the power of the purse. The hold on Ukraine aid became a key factor in lawmakers' party-line vote to impeach Trump in December 2019 for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. The Senate [later](#)

[acquitted](#) him.

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In a letter obtained by The Associated Press, Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren told Duffey that his role in withholding aid "raises concerns" about whether he will follow the law if approved for the powerful Pentagon position that oversees a large weapons-buying budget. It has been a gatekeeper for generating more than \$66 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

Kori Schake, a senior fellow and director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, said Duffey's budget-office experience was valuable and should make him an effective weapons buyer for the Pentagon.

But "he and others who favor presidential impoundment of congressionally appropriated funds should be made to commit in confirmation hearings to expending what Congress appropriates," Schake said.

Warren sent Duffey more than 40 questions in advance of his Senate confirmation hearing that not only seek more information about his part in the 2019 aid pause but ask whether he would be responsive to congressional oversight because he did not comply with a subpoena to testify during Congress' impeachment investigation.

That refusal "bodes poorly for your plans to be honest and open with Congress and the American people when overseeing acquisitions and contracts for programs that uphold our national security," Warren said in her letter to Duffey.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment Monday about Duffey's nomination or whether his nomination signaled a change in direction for weapons support to Ukraine.

Trump was impeached a second time in 2021 following the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.



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