

An AP California Centerpiece; Impeachment fades as issue in races against House prosecutors

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Body

A year after Democrats vowed to oust Rep. Jim Rogan and other House prosecutors of President Clinton, impeachment seems to have all but vanished as an **issue**.

Very few of the Republicans are in any danger in either their party's primaries or the November elections, and their opponents have been reluctant to criticize their role in the trial. More often, the impeachment **issue** has emerged in fund-raising pitches, and these have been behind-the-scenes appeals addressed to party activists.

"I really don't think that I need to talk about impeachment. The voters are really quite aware of Rogan's role in the trial," said Rogan's Democratic opponent, state Sen. Adam Schiff said. "I think the role impeachment has played is it's only the most recent and most visible example of his detachment from the district."

Rogan, who is running for his third term, is probably the most vulnerable of the House prosecutors, but his weakness seems to be a result of a growing Democratic majority among his electorate, not impeachment.

Issues like gun control, abortion and even interstate extensions are dominating the tight **race** in this suburban Los Angeles district, home to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the West's first freeway. Neither candidate is opposed in the March 7 primary.

"It was a lot of noise about something irrelevant," said Don Garrett, an accountant and undecided voter sitting outside a coffee shop.

Rogan makes no apologies for his role in the impeachment trial and said he would do it again "100 years from tomorrow."

"I didn't run for Congress to impeach anybody," Rogan said. "Had I failed to act as I did, I would have failed in my oath of the office."

Of the 12 other House managers, Bob Barr of Georgia faces a mild threat from a Democrat, nine are in safe Republican seats, Charles Canady of Florida isn't running, and Bill McCollum of Florida is seeking a seat in the Senate and is facing strong opposition in the GOP primary but has a big advantage in fund-raising.

"I think that the motto for impeachment this year is 'don't go there,'" said Amy Walter, an editor at The Cook Political Report, based in Washington.

Fund-raising letters are the exception, and Rogan and Schiff said they are hitting on the theme in those appeals only because the other is doing the same.

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Schiff solicited donations with a letter from "All in the Family" TV producer Norman Lear. Lear implored donors to help Schiff fight the "right-wing" Rogan, who "embarrassed himself - and the nation - during the Clinton impeachment proceedings for his uncompromising zealotry as a 'House Manager.'"

Rogan enlisted the help of fellow House managers Asa Hutchinson and Lindsey Graham at his fund-raisers. In one letter, Rogan said his campaign will cost him millions of dollars because "Bill Clinton wants to make an example of me for standing up for the Constitution and the rule of law."

The Republicans have a 222-211 advantage over the Democrats in the House, with two independents, and districts like Rogan's could prove key in determining whether the GOP keeps control of Congress. Rogan won just 50 percent in 1996 and 51 percent in his re-election in 1998.

The congressional district known for palm tree-lined streets and stately homes has been in Republican hands for more than 40 years but has undergone dramatic changes in the past decade.

Middle-income and increasingly Democratic blacks, Armenians, Asians and Hispanics have moved into neighborhoods once filled mostly by white, older, upper-income Republicans. Aerospace jobs have dwindled, while entertainment industries like Warner Bros., Walt Disney Co. and NBC have thrived.

In Pasadena, voters are well aware of Rogan's role in the trial, but his stands on abortion (Rogan is against it) and gun control (he opposes most) are considered more divisive issues. A battle over an extension of Interstate 710 through Pasadena also has become an issue. Rogan opposed federal funding; Schiff believes he should have done so earlier.

For those who voted against Rogan before, the impeachment only confirmed their thinking.

"To me, he never represented my opinion and seeing him up there ... just put me and a lot of other people over the top," said Darryl Bates, a 41-year-old film director and editor and registered Democrat.

For Garrett, a registered Republican, the impeachment trial was a vindictive, partisan effort. "What Rogan did on a national basis is interesting, but what he does locally is what's important," he said.

Graphic

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