

# DAILY NEWS

## What ‘national nightmare’? We got through impeachment just fine, thank you

Gene Healy

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“Our long national nightmare is over”: That’s how newly minted President Gerald Ford described the impeachment struggle that led Richard Nixon to resign. “Nightmare” wasn’t hyperbolic enough for Kenneth Starr, the former independent counsel and scourge of Bill Clinton who joined President Trump’s impeachment defense team in January. In his argument to the Senate, Starr proclaimed that “impeachment is hell” (*now* he tells us!).

That impeachment is a grievous national trauma was the rare bipartisan sentiment on Capitol Hill over the last two months: a “sad,” “solemn,” “grave” affair — so many reasons to wear black. Pols and pundits warned us that we risked rattling the markets, distracting Congress from the vital business of government, stoking partisan furies — perhaps even civil war.

“The dark cloud is descending upon this House and I am fearful, Madame Speaker,” Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia moaned on the eve of the House vote.

But after three serious presidential impeachment campaigns in the last five decades, we should know better by now. Putting a president on trial for his job has never been a national nightmare. None of the scare stories are true.

Whatever disruption impeachment causes, it’s clearly not the kind that spooks investors. The Clinton impeachment coincided with one of the biggest bull markets in history, and — despite Trump’s warning that “the Impeachment Hoax is hurting our Stock Market,” the Dow and S&P hit record highs the day after the House vote.

Nor, for better or worse, does impeachment paralyze government. It never has. During the alleged Watergate “nightmare,” Congress found time to time to pass landmark legislation like the Endangered Species Act, the War Powers Resolution and the Impoundment Control Act.

In the three weeks after the House authorized the Clinton impeachment inquiry, Congress passed four major bills.

The legislative onslaught that accompanied Trump’s impeachment included paid family leave for federal workers, hiking the minimum tobacco age to 21 and creating a Space Force. Depending on how you evaluate that record, you might find yourself wishing impeachment was *more* of a distraction.

And can we finally put to rest the notion that impeachment is so divisive it might lead to actual war? That particular scare story seems to have originated with former Trump consigliere Roger Stone, but it somehow got serious consideration in respectable publications like the New

Yorker and Bloomberg News. The idea that impeachment would stoke red-on-blue violence was silly to begin with and looks even more absurd now. Judging by the Trump trial's weak Nielsens, most Americans weren't even mad enough to tune in.

All told, our third presidential impeachment didn't do the country any visible harm.

But did it do us any good? Perhaps so: Recent polls suggest that Americans were split on whether Trump should be removed, but clear majorities agreed he abused his power. Impeachment by the House, without conviction in the Senate, had the effect of censuring Trump for his conduct without ejecting him from his job. Indeed, it's the only kind of presidential censure that's ever worked.

In the run-up to the House vote, some speculated that Trump actually *wanted to be impeached*. But judging by the president's near-daily meltdowns on Twitter, he never relished the prospect. Throughout the trial, Trump wailed about having “the stigma of impeachment attached to my name”; and in Thursday's “VICTORY” rally, called the process “a terrible ordeal.”

“We went through hell unfairly,” Trump complained, proving that Starr wasn't entirely wrong: Impeachment *is* hell, for the president at least.

This president engaged in a Nixonian attempt to “use the available federal machinery to screw [his] political enemies” — and Congress made him pay a price. Whether Trump has “learned his lesson” is another question entirely.

*Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and author of “Indispensable Remedy: The Broad Scope of the Constitution's Impeachment Power.”*