



## The five dumbest things said about impeachment so far

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Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) will release the articles of impeachment from almost a month-long stint in constitutional limbo and, finally, send them to the Senate for trial. The upper chamber has rarely lived up to the hype of “world’s greatest deliberative body,” but surely it can do better than serve up the sort of hyperbolic twaddle and partisan hackery on tap in December’s House debate. Toward that end, let’s review some of last month’s lowlights.

*“This is the first partisan ‘impeachment’ in the history of the republic.”*

So said Rep. Doug Collins, ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee. Actually, partisan impeachments have been with us from the very start of our constitutional history, and presidential impeachments have *always* been overwhelmingly party-line. Even in the Nixon near-impeachment (he quit before the full House could vote), a majority of Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee voted against every article.

Yes, Trump’s was a “partisan impeachment,” but, judged by the percentage of aisle-crossers, the vote was only slightly more party-line than the two prior presidential impeachments, Johnson’s and Clinton’s. Besides, the mere fact that the vote was polarized tells us nothing about which side has the better case.

*There was “nothing untoward” about Trump’s request for investigation.*

That’s Rep. Collins again, in his dissent to the Judiciary Committee’s impeachment report. In that “perfect” July 25 phone call, President Trump was trying to smoke out “potential corruption,” says Collins; that the target happened to be Trump’s leading rival in the 2020 presidential race was a happy accident, apparently. One could have said much the same about Nixon’s push for IRS investigations of his political opponents, but nobody at the time thought that passed the straight-face test.

Still, it’s not as if Trump’s impeachers covered themselves in forensic glory either.

*Delaying military aid to Ukraine “endangered our national security”*

That was a common refrain on the House floor; at least five Democratic members deployed the charge. The Judiciary report is more alarmist still: Trump's conduct was a "betrayal of national security," proving that he "endangers our lives."

In fact, a two-month delay in military aid didn't noticeably endanger *Ukrainian* national security, much less America's. Ukraine's struggle with Russia is tangential to U.S. security interests, and the wisdom of current U.S. policy, dubious at best.

So what? The core case against Trump, as the first article of impeachment says, is that he misused the powers of his office "for corrupt purposes in pursuit of personal political benefit." Whether it's necessary or wise for the U.S. to fight a proxy war on Russia's border is irrelevant to that charge.

*"What the president did was so much worse than even what Richard Nixon did."*

...that's House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's take, seconded by Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, among others.

Really? The Nixon administration paid cash to criminal defendants in exchange for silence, orchestrated burglaries and illegal wiretaps—and even contemplated firebombing the Brookings Institution. But "Worse than Watergate" isn't the constitutional standard. Even Professor Jonathan Turley, the lone Republican witness at HJC's hearing on "Constitutional Grounds for Presidential Impeachment," testified that "there is no need to out-Nixon Nixon. Impeachable will do."

*Trump's impeachment was "a dark day" for America*

That was the rare bipartisan sentiment in the House debate: "A solemn and sad day," per Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.); "The dark cloud is descending upon this House and I am fearful, Madame Speaker," Rep. Collins moaned; "I have descended into the belly of the beast," wailed Rep. Clay Higgins (R-La.), "I've witnessed a terror within."

Calm down: get a hold of yourselves! If experience is any guide, we have little to fear from another presidential removal attempt. In the Nixon and Clinton cases, no one rioted, Congress wasn't "paralyzed," and, during the Clinton imbroglio, Wall Street enjoyed one of its biggest bull markets in history and rallied to new highs as Trump's impeachment hearings began.

History suggests we'll probably make it through this impeachment struggle as well. But is it too much to ask that the Senate debate be less hysterical—and a little smarter?

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