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If Trump should be impeached, then all presidents should

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In 2007, Republican Rep. Walter Jones supported impeaching President George W. Bush. Some liberal Democrats joined him. In 2012, Jones supported impeaching President Barack Obama. Virtually no one outside of a few libertarian-leaning Republicans showed him any support. The issue was the same each time: the constitutionality of how presidents wage war. Jones's case was fairly clear-cut, and this type of executive overreach is precisely the reason a parliamentary tool such as impeachment exists.

And no one cared.

Everybody cared on Wednesday after the Democratic-majority House voted to impeach President Trump. Democrats saw it as a moral victory. Republicans blasted it as distracting nonsense.

But what was at stake? What was Trump's crime? The president allegedly tried to withhold U.S. foreign aid to Ukraine to get them to bend to his will, specifically to look into Joe Biden's political affairs.

Just like Biden once did as vice president with Ukraine. He even bragged about it. Democrats have tried in vain to argue that what Biden did is not the same, because he was trying to get a corrupt prosecutor fired. But if you're not trying to score political points, it seems Republicans can make an equally legitimate defense of Trump seeking an investigation into foreign corruption.

Trump defender Sen. Rand Paul has said using foreign aid as leverage to force other nations to act a certain way is exactly why it exists. Paul is opposed to foreign aid for this and others reasons. He has even said the Democrats' impeachment push is an attempt to "criminalize" politics as usual.

Which is exactly what Democrats say about Biden holding foreign aid hostage until Ukraine obeyed his orders. That was just politics. But not when Trump does it. That's completely different. Somehow.

Confused yet? Me, too. So, likely, are millions of people.

It's difficult to get around the fact that if Trump deserved his impeachment, most other modern presidents probably do as well and for offenses much worse than this. Jones was more justified in his reasons for impeachment than any of the blathering going on now on both sides, but no one cared because there were no partisan angles or gain in it.

The Cato Institute's Gene Healy has made the argument that we should be impeaching presidents all the time. He's not wrong. Most have been and are rife with corruption, most of which we probably don't know about.

But Trump defenders are also correct that it feels like this president is being singled out for behavior that has been acceptable in the past, which is why it's so important for Democrats to insist Biden didn't do the same thing, even though he appeared to. Paul worries, "I hope it doesn't devolve into ... we either impeach or throw presidents into jail just because we don't like their politics. I think that will dumb down and destroy the country."

Paul is not wrong, either. Will politics devolve into constant impeachment? It's hard not to feel that this whole controversy has already dumbed down the country.

Today, the nation is bitterly divided over an impeachment that understandably doesn't make sense to many. It's hard not to view it as purely partisan when the effort obviously only has traction precisely because it is partisan, as Jones could have attested.

What the Democrats accomplished Wednesday is probably like whacking a pro wrestler with a steel chair. The whacker is obviously trying to do the whackee harm, but it is unlikely to garner much support beyond his or her faction. Whether this ends up hurting Democrats more than it helps is something time will tell.

The same is true about the future of impeachment.

Jones once tried to impeach presidents over the core constitutional issues of war and peace — and no one paid any attention. Most believe he would have joined Democrats to impeach Trump this week.

Should presidents be impeached more often? Perhaps, perhaps not. Regardless, each president deserves a clear and consistent standard for impeachment.