

Dec. 5, 2019

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi Update on Impeachment

Full text as delivered

Good morning. Let us begin where our founders began in 1776: “When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another ...” With those words our founders courageously began our Declaration of Independence. From an oppressive monarch, from among other grievances, the king's refusal to follow rightfully passed laws.

In the course of today's events, it becomes necessary for us to address, among other grievances, the president's failure to faithfully execute the law. When crafting the Constitution, the founders feared the return of a monarchy in America. And having just fought a war of independence, they specifically feared the prospect of a king president corrupted by foreign influence. During the constitutional convention James Madison, the architect of the Constitution, warned that a president might betray his trust to foreign powers that might prove fatal to the Republic.

Another founder – Gouverneur Morris – feared that a president may be bribed by a greater interest to betray his trust. He emphasized that this magistrate is not the king. The people are the king. They therefore created a constitutional remedy to protect against a dangerous or corrupt leader: impeachment. Unless the constitution contained an impeachment provision, one founder warned, a president might “spare no effort or means whatsoever to get himself re-elected.” Similarly George Mason insisted that a president who procured an appointment in his first instance through improper and corrupt acts might repeat his guilt and return to power.

During the debate over impeachment at the constitutional convention, George Mason also asked: “Shall any man be above justice? Shall that man be above it who can commit the most extensive injustice?” In his great wisdom, he knew that injustice committed by the president erodes the rule of law. The very idea of fair justice, which is the bedrock of our democracy.

And if we allow a president to be above the law, we do so surely at the peril of our republic. In America, no one is above the law. Over the past few weeks, through the Intelligence Committee working with the Foreign Affairs and Oversight committees, the American people have heard the testimony of truly patriotic career public servants, distinguished diplomats and decorated war heroes — some of the president's own appointees.

The facts are uncontested. The president abused his power for his own personal political benefit at the expense of our national security by withholding military aid and crucial oval office meeting in exchange for an announcement of an investigation into his political rival. Yesterday, the Judiciary Committee, at the Judiciary Committee, the American people heard testimony from

leading American constitutional scholars who illuminated without a doubt that the president's actions are a profound violation of the public trust. The president's actions have seriously violated the Constitution. Especially when he says and acts upon the belief – “Article II says I can do whatever I want.” No. His wrongdoing strikes at the very heart of the Constitution. A separation of powers. Three co-equal branches — each a check and balance on the other. A republic, if we can keep it, said Benjamin Franklin.

Our democracy is what is at stake. The president leaves us no choice but to act because he is trying to corrupt, once again, the election for his own benefit. The president has engaged in an abuse of power, undermining our national security and jeopardizing the integrity of our elections. His actions are in defiance of the vision of our founders and the oath of office that he takes to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

Sadly, but with confidence and humility, with allegiance to our founders, and a heart full of love for America, today I'm asking our chairmen to proceed with articles of impeachment. I commend our committee chairs and our members for their somber approach to actions which I wish the president had not made necessary.

In signing the Declaration of Independence, our founders invoked a firm reliance on divine providence. Democrats, too, are prayerful and we will proceed in a manner worthy of our oath of office to support and defend the Constitution of the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic, so help us God. Thank you.