

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT

WHAT NEXT?

The Democratic-led House of Representatives voted largely along party lines to impeach US President Donald Trump for obstruction of Congress and abuse of power over his dealings with Ukraine. Trump is only the third United States president to be impeached. No president has ever been removed from office via the impeachment process. The landmark votes on Wednesday set up a likely January trial in the Republican-controlled Senate, where Trump is expected to be acquitted. As politicians move to the trial phase, here's what to expect next:

ON WHAT CHARGES WAS TRUMP IMPEACHED?

Trump has been impeached on charges that he abused his power in office and obstructed Congress during the impeachment investigation. Democrats accuse Trump of pressuring Ukraine to open an investigation into the president's political rival and former vice president, Joe Biden, who is also a frontrunner in the 2020 Democratic presidential race. They also charge that the president obstructed their investigation by refusing to comply with subpoenas and directing members of his administration to do the same. The impeachment inquiry, launched in September following a whistle-blower complaint, was centred on a July 25 phone call during which Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to open an investigation into Biden and his son, Hunter, who had served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company. There has been no evidence of wrongdoing by the Bidens. At the time of the call, the Trump administration was withholding nearly \$400m in Congress-approved military assistance from Ukraine.

WHAT IS A SENATE TRIAL?

The articles of impeachment are now expected to be sent to the Senate, where senators will consider evidence, hear witnesses and vote to acquit or convict the president. The chief justice of the US Supreme Court presides over the trial. A two-thirds majority vote is required in the 100-member Senate to convict and remove a president from office. A conviction appears unlikely in the case of Trump. The Senate is made up of 53 Republicans, 45 Democrats



and two independents who caucus with the Democrats. At least 20 Republicans would have to vote with all Democrats and the two independents to remove the president from office. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has indicated that he would like swift proceedings. But following Wednesday's impeachment votes, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she would wait, for now, to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate. US media have reported that some House Democrats are urging Pelosi to withhold the transmittal of the articles until the "appropriate time". Withholding the articles of impeachment may give the Democrats leverage when it comes to setting the procedures for the trial. Pelosi said Democrats will make a decision on next steps as "a group".

WHEN WILL A SENATE TRIAL TAKE PLACE?

Once the Senate receives the articles of impeachment, a trial can begin. No firm date for a Senate trial has been set, but McConnell has said it will be the chambers' "first order of business" upon returning to Washington, DC, in the new year. Senate Democrats have proposed a trial plan that would see proceedings begin on January 6. Presentations by House managers, who would effectively work as prosecutors, would begin on January 9 under this plan. It is unlikely that Senate Republicans would agree to the Democrats' exact proposal.

WHO WOULD BECOME PRESIDENT IF TRUMP REMOVED?

In the unlikely event that the Senate convicts and removes Trump from office, Vice President Mike Pence would become president and complete Trump's term, which ends on January 20, 2021.

SOURCE: ALJAZERA



Residents watch a large bushfire as seen from Bargo, 150km southwest of Sydney, yesterday. Inset, An old car burns from bushfires in Balmoral area.

PHOTO: AFP



Impeachment may help Trump

CNN ONLINE

The House has voted to impeach President Donald Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress -- both tied to his actions around a July 25 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

But there's growing evidence that the public impeachment proceedings may actually be helping Trump politically.

Take a new Gallup poll released Wednesday morning, before the House vote, which shows two things happening since House Democrats, led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, opened up a formal impeachment inquiry in October regarding Trump's conduct with Zelenskyy: Trump's job approval rating has gone from 39% to 45% and support for Trump's impeachment and removal has dipped from 52% to 46%.

Those results largely affirm other data out over the past week or so that suggest support for impeachment has dipped. In a CNN national poll released earlier this week, 45% said they supported the impeachment and removal of the President -- down from 50% who said the same in a mid-November CNN survey. That same poll showed opposition to impeachment/removal at 46%, up 4 points from mid-November. And a CNN "poll of polls" -- an average of all six most recent quality/credible national polling conducted between December 4 and December 15 -- showed 46% favored impeachment and

removal as compared to 49% who did not.

Now these numbers are not "good" for Trump -- as he so often takes to Twitter to proclaim. Compared to recent past presidents -- including Bill Clinton, who actually was impeached -- a significantly larger chunk of the public now favors Trump's removal than ever felt that way about Clinton, Barack Obama or George W. Bush. In fact, Trump's current numbers on impeachment are most similar to those of Richard Nixon in the spring of 1974.



But what the trend line in recent weeks suggests is that the intense focus on impeachment has marginally helped, not hurt Trump. The change in public opinion is slight, yes. And it may well be temporary. But for the moment, it's the sort of thing that has to make Democrats a little (and maybe more than a little) nervous about the path they have chosen before the 2020 election.

Remember this: Pelosi did not want to go down the impeachment path. She stood

athwart her party over the summer as more and more of her Democratic members announced their support for an impeachment inquiry over Trump's conduct in connection to special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election. Her concern, which she voiced publicly and privately, was that a partisan impeachment -- one without significant bipartisan support -- would too bitterly divide the country to make it worth doing.

"Impeachment is so divisive to the country that unless there's something so compelling and overwhelming and bipartisan, I don't think we should go down that path, because it divides the country. And he's just not worth it," Pelosi told The Washington Post.

That all changed in the fall, when a whistleblower complaint regarding Trump's actions on that July 25 call surfaced. But simply because Pelosi acquiesced to that inexorable momentum does not mean that her concerns about the politics of impeachment had changed. What Pelosi knew then -- and knows now -- is that impeachment is a chaos-creator in the American electorate. There is simply no certainty about how the voters -- particularly the small number of independent and/or undecided voters -- will react to all of this.

But considering the recent polls, Democrats might have helped Trump to get voters' sympathy ahead of the 2020 vote.

'Turning point' as number of male smokers drops

AFP, Geneva

The number of male tobacco users is falling for the first time, the World Health Organization said yesterday, hailing a "major shift" in efforts to kick the world's deadly tobacco addiction.

The number of women and girls who use tobacco products has been steadily declining for years. But tobacco use among males -- who account for the overwhelming majority of smokers -- has until now been expanding.

In a new report, the UN health agency hailed the beginning decline as a powerful indication that anti-smoking campaigns around the globe had begun to pay off.

But it warned that far more was needed to kick the addiction, which is estimated to kill some eight million people each year.

For the past two decades, global tobacco use has been slowly dwindling, from 1.397 billion users in 2000 to 1.337 billion in 2018. This means around 60 million fewer people were using tobacco products, even as the global populations has swelled.

But that reduction has been strongly driven by declines in the number of women and girls using tobacco products, WHO said, with the number dropping from 346 million in 2000 to 244 million last year.

Over the same period, the number of male tobacco users rose by around 40 million, from 1.05 billion to 1.093 billion.

But men, who today account for more than 80 percent of all tobacco users, are finally beginning to kick the habit.

It shows that by 2020, the ranks of male users will shrink by two million people compared to last year's number, and by 2025, there are projected to be six million fewer male tobacco users than in 2018, so around 1.087 billion.



Members of the Syrian Civil Defence, also known as the White Helmets, recover a wounded girl from the rubble of a building following a reported Russian air strike in the village of Tal Mardikh in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UN hails 'decisive shift' in refugee assistance

The UN hailed Wednesday a "decisive shift" in the approach to helping surging numbers of displaced people, after a summit ended with billions in donations and concrete promises to simplify refugee integration. The Global Refugee Forum opened in Geneva on Tuesday to shore up international support for world's some 26 million refugees. In all, it said more than 770 pledges were made for financial support but also for things like improving refugee access to employment, education, electricity, infrastructure and promises of more resettlement spots for the most vulnerable. UNHCR said it had received pledges of more than \$4.7 billion by the World Bank Group, and \$1.0 billion from the Inter-American Development Bank. In addition, a broad range of states and other entities had jointly pledged more than \$2.0 billion.

Israel strikes Gaza after rocket attack

Israeli warplanes attacked an arms plant in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip early yesterday, after Palestinian militants in the enclave fired a rocket at Israel, the army said. "Overnight, a rocket was launched from the Gaza Strip at Israeli territory," an army statement said. "In response... fighter jets struck a Hamas weapons manufacturing site in the northern Gaza Strip." There were no immediate reports of casualties. Later yesterday, Israeli authorities announced a punitive reduction in the fishing zone off Gaza.

'Nobody knows' causes of climate change: Putin



Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said "nobody knows" what causes climate change, seeming to cast doubt over whether global warming is of manmade origin and stating it could be blamed on cosmological processes. "Nobody knows the origins of global climate change," Putin told reporters at the start of his marathon end-of-year news conference. "We know that in the history of our Earth there have been periods of warming and cooling and it could depend on processes in the universe," he added. But Putin acknowledged that climate change was a major issue, saying we "must undertake maximum efforts to ensure that the climate does not change dramatically." He insisted Russia's emissions were far lower than those of major Western countries and that it stood by its obligations under the Paris climate accord.

SOURCE: AFP

UK PM sets sight at quick Brexit

Scottish leader steps up battle for 'unarguable' independence referendum

AFP, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday put Britain's departure from the EU at the top of the agenda, as Queen Elizabeth II read out his plans for government in a parliamentary ceremony following a sweeping election win.

The monarch formally opened parliament with plenty of traditional pomp and pageantry before ermine and red-robed members of the upper House of Lords, and MPs from the lower House of Commons.

But before the monarch's set-piece speech, Scotland's first minister called for a new vote on independence, signalling a looming constitutional battle between London and Edinburgh.

Nicola Sturgeon said Brexit and election results north of the border made a clear "constitutional and democratic case" for a fresh look about whether Scotland should end its more than 300-year-old union with England and Wales.

She called on London to transfer powers allowing the devolved administration in Edinburgh to hold the vote.

Top of Johnson's to-do list is a bill to

ratify the terms of Britain's exit from the European Union, which he negotiated in October but could not get through a deadlocked parliament.

Now with a comfortable majority in the 650-seat House of Commons, he hopes to push through the deal in time to fulfil his election campaign pledge to "Get Brexit



Done" on the next EU deadline.

"My government's priority is to deliver the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union on 31st January," the queen confirmed from a gilded throne.

She added: "Thereafter, my ministers will seek a future relationship with the EU based on a free-trade agreement that benefits the whole of the United Kingdom."

In a sign of the government's vow to keep to the Brexit timetable, a spokesman said the Department for Exiting the European Union "will be wound up, once the UK leaves the EU on 31 January".

The highlight of the proposed legislation was the Withdrawal Agreement Bill (WAB) to ratify the terms of Brexit, which will be put to a first vote among MPs on Friday.

It covers Britain's financial obligations to the EU, the rights of European expatriates and new arrangements for Northern Ireland.

The bill will also enshrine the dates of a transition period, which will keep EU-UK ties largely unchanged until December 31, 2020, to allow both sides to sign a new trade deal.

The period can be extended for up to two years but London insists this will not be necessary. But the EU has warned the timetable is extremely tight to agree a new relationship after Britain leaves the bloc's single market and customs union.

The WAB also includes plans to allow courts other than the Supreme Court to overturn European Court of Justice rulings, to ensure Britain can more swiftly extricate itself from European case law.

UK GOVT'S NEW PROGRAMME

MAIN POINTS

Here are the main points from Queen Elizabeth II's speech in parliament yesterday setting out the British government's legislative programme:

**BREXIT:** Government's priority is to deliver Britain's departure from the EU on January 31, 2020. London to seek a future relationship with Brussels based on a free trade agreement. Britain to begin trade negotiations "with other leading global economies".

**NORTHERN IRELAND:** Integrity of the United Kingdom "of the utmost importance". Ministers to work urgently to facilitate talks on restoring devolved regional government in Northern Ireland.

**HEALTH:** National Health Service funding boost to be "enshrined in law". Boosting size of NHS workforce. Foreign healthcare professionals to have "fast-track entry" visa to Britain. Government to seek cross-party accord on long-term social care policy.

**IMMIGRATION:** "A modern, fair, points-based immigration system will welcome skilled workers from across the world."

**DEFENCE:** "Measures will be developed to tackle hostile activity conducted by foreign states." Nato commitment to spend two percent of national income on defence reaffirmed.

**CLIMATE CHANGE:** Net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 target reaffirmed. Legally binding targets, including for air quality. Export of polluting plastic waste to countries outside the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to be banned.

**PARLIAMENT:** Laws blocking the prime minister from calling an election at the time of his choosing to be repealed.

**EDUCATION:** Funding per pupil to increase.

PHOTO: AFP