

Divided House approves impeachment rules

By **ALAN FRAM and MATTHEW DALY**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats swept a rules package for their impeachment probe of President Donald Trump through a divided House, as the chamber’s first vote on the investigation highlighted the partisan breach the issue has only deepened.

By 232-196, lawmakers on Thursday approved the procedures they’ll follow as weeks of closed-door interviews with witnesses evolve into public committee hearings and — almost certainly — votes on whether the House should recommend Trump’s removal.

All voting Republicans opposed the package. Every voting Democrat but two supported it.

Underscoring the pressure Trump has heaped on his party’s lawmakers, he tweeted, “Now is the time for Republicans to stand together and defend the leader of their party against these smears.”

Yet the roll call also accentuated how Democrats have rallied behind the impeachment inquiry after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi spent months urging caution until evidence and public support had grown.

She and other Democratic leaders had feared a premature vote would wound the reelection prospects of dozens of their members, including freshmen and lawmakers from Trump-won districts or seats held previously by Republicans. But recent polls have shown voters’ growing receptivity to the investigation and, to a lesser degree, ousting Trump.

That and evidence that House investigators have amassed have helped unify Democrats, including those from GOP areas. Rep. Cindy Axne, D-Iowa, said she was supporting a pathway to giving “the American people the facts they deserve,” while Rep. Andy Kim, D-N.J., said voters warrant “the uninhibited truth.”

Yet Republicans were also buoyed by polling, which has shown that GOP voters stand unflinchingly behind Trump.

“The impeachment-obsessed Democrats just flushed their majority down the toilet,” said Michael McAdams, a spokesman for



Andrew Harnik/AP Photo

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi gavels as the House votes 232-196 to pass resolution on impeachment procedure to move forward into the next phase of the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump.

House Republicans’ campaign arm.

Elsewhere at the Capitol on Thursday, three House panels led by the Intelligence Committee questioned their latest witness into the allegations that led to the impeachment inquiry: that Trump pressured Ukraine to produce dirt on his Democratic political rivals by withholding military aid and an Oval Office meeting craved by the country’s new president.

Tim Morrison, who stepped down from the National Security Council the day before his appearance, testified — still behind closed doors — that he saw nothing illegal in Trump’s phone call with the Ukrainian president that is at the center of the Democrat-led investigation.

Yet, Morrison also largely confirmed much of what William Taylor, the highest-ranking U.S. official in Ukraine, said in earlier, highly critical testimony about the call, which Taylor said he and Morrison discussed several times.

The Democrats are still waiting to hear if Morrison’s

one-time boss John Bolton will testify. They have subpoenaed former national security adviser Bolton, who quit the administration after disagreements with Trump over his handling of Ukraine.

In the House inquiry vote, the only Democratic “no” votes were by Reps. Jeff Van Drew, a New Jersey freshman, and veteran Colin Peterson of Minnesota, one of the House’s most conservative Democrats. Both are battling for reelection in Republican-leaning districts.

Also supporting the rules was independent Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan, who left the GOP this year after announcing he was open to considering Trump’s impeachment.

Thursday’s House debate was laced with high-minded appeals to defend the Constitution and Congress’ independence, as well as partisan taunts.

“What are we fighting for? Defending our democracy,” Pelosi said.

She addressed lawmakers with a poster of the American flag beside her and

opened her comments by reading from the preamble to the Constitution. She also said the rules would let lawmakers decide whether to impeach Trump “based on the truth.”

“I don’t know why the Republicans are afraid of the truth,” she said.

But her counterpart, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, cast the process as a skewed attempt to railroad a president whom Democrats have detested since before he took office.

“Democrats are trying to impeach the president because they are scared they cannot defeat him at the ballot box,” he said.

No. 2 House GOP leader Steve Scalise, R-La., accused Democrats of imposing “Soviet-style rules.” His backdrop was a bright red poster depicting the Soviet hammer and sickle emblem and the famous St. Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow’s Red Square.

The House is at least weeks away from deciding whether to vote on actually impeaching Trump. If it does, the Senate would hold

a trial on whether to remove him from office. That GOP-run chamber seems highly likely to keep him in the White House.

Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., likened Democrats to a “cult,” accusing them of bouncing from “one outlandish conspiracy theory to another.” Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., pointedly said she looked forward to Republicans “prioritizing country over party, just as we took an oath to do.”

Democrats said the procedures are similar to rules used during the impeachment proceedings of Presidents Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton.

Pelosi decided to have the vote following a GOP drumbeat that the inquiry was tainted because lawmakers hadn’t voted to formally commence the work. The rules direct House committees “to continue their ongoing investigations” of Trump.

Democrats hope Thursday’s vote will undercut GOP assertions that the process has been invalid. They’ve noted that there is no constitutional provision

or House rule requiring such a vote.

The rules require the House Intelligence Committee — now leading the investigation — to issue a report and release transcripts of its closed-door interviews, which members of both parties have attended.

The Judiciary Committee would then decide whether to recommend that the House impeach Trump.

Republicans could only issue subpoenas for witnesses to appear if the committees holding the hearings approve them — in effect giving Democrats veto power.

Attorneys for Trump could participate in the Judiciary Committee proceedings. Democrats would retain leverage by empowering panel Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., to deny requests by Trump representatives to call witnesses if the White House continues to “unlawfully refuse” to provide testimony or documents Congress demands.

Associated Press writers Andrew Taylor and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

US jobs report for October solid despite GM strike

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A solid October jobs report on Friday spotlighted the surprising durability of the U.S. economy in the face of persistent trade conflicts and a global slowdown.

The economy managed to add 128,000 jobs last month even though tens of thousands of workers were temporarily counted as unemployed because of the now-settled strike against General Motors. What’s more, the government revised up its combined estimate of job growth for August and September by a robust 95,000.

Though the unemployment rate ticked up from 3.5% to 3.6% in October, it’s still near a five-decade low.

And for a second straight month, average hourly wages rose a decent, if less than spectacular, 3% from a year ago.

The report from the Labor Department suggested that the economy has enough strength to keep expanding despite the threats from overseas, political tensions at home, a downturn in manufacturing and a chronic gap between the wealthiest Americans and everyone else.

The healthy level of hiring also makes it less likely that the Federal Reserve, which

cut short-term interest rates this week for a third time this year, will do so again anytime soon.

“This was an unambiguously strong report,” said Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics.

The jobs data put stock investors in a buying mood. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed up 301 points for the day, or 1.1%.

Friday’s jobs report also raised the prospect of further job growth to come. The settlement of the GM strike, which contributed to the temporary loss of 41,600 auto factory and likely other related jobs last month, seems sure to lead to a return of those jobs in coming months.

In addition, the labor force participation rate, a gauge of how many adults either have a job or looking for one, reached 63.3%, the best since 2013. That suggests that a rising number of people continue to think it’s a good time to find a job.

Besides GM, a temporary drag on hiring last month was the U.S. Census. The government let go of 20,000 short-term workers who had been helping prepare for the 2020 survey.

The economy has been expanding for more than a decade, the longest period of growth on record. But the

bump from the 2018 tax cuts is fading, and an aging population and other demographic forces are slowing potential growth.

That slowdown could be worrisome for President Donald Trump, who is seeking re-election next year amid an impeachment inquiry. The economy appears unable to achieve the lasting growth of more than 3% annually that Trump had promised. Within 30 minutes of the jobs report’s release, though, the president celebrated the figures on Twitter as a “blowout,” adding that “USA ROCKS.”

Job growth so far this year has averaged 167,000 a month, down from an average of 223,000 in 2018, according to Labor Department figures. Even so, hiring remains high enough to keep the unemployment rate from rising even as overall growth has become more tepid. On Wednesday, the government estimated that the economy grew in the July-October quarter at a modest 1.9% annual rate.

The hot job market is spurring many employers to raise wages to attract and retain workers. Yet those gains may not always leave workers feeling better off as they grapple with high housing, transportation, health and education expenses.

California governor threatens a potential takeover of PG&E

By **ADAM BEAM**
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California’s governor on Friday threatened a possible takeover of the troubled utility blamed for sparking deadly wildfires across the state with its outdated equipment unless it can emerge from bankruptcy ahead of next year’s wildfire season with a plan focused on safety.

Gov. Gavin Newsom called all sides to a meeting early next week, saying he would personally try to mediate a solution involving Pacific Gas & Electric.

But if an agreement can’t be reached, Newsom said, “then the state will prepare itself as backup for a scenario where we do that job for them.”

PG&E has come under more scrutiny in recent weeks as it cut off power to millions of people to avoid a repeat of last year’s deadly fire season.

The shutoffs have angered residents, businesses and local governments, who say the company has done a poor job of communicating.

“This is not the new normal,” Newsom said. “There are things that can be done immediately and will be done immediately.”

Pacific Gas & Electric

filed for bankruptcy earlier this year after a 2018 wildfire mostly destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 85 people. An investigation revealed the fire was started by one of the company’s powerlines that was knocked down during a windstorm.

The utility is facing up to \$30 billion in damages from that fire and others.

Shareholders and creditors have been battling for control of the utility in bankruptcy court, offering two competing plans for the company’s future.

A federal judge has expressed concern the two sides are not making progress, and last week appointed a mediator to try and resolve the case.

In June, Newsom signed a law setting up a \$21 billion fund that could help utility companies pay out claims for future wildfires as climate change makes them more frequent and destructive.

Utility companies would have to spend at least \$5 billion on safety improvements and meet new safety standards to participate. PG&E would have to be out of bankruptcy by June 30th to use the fund.

Friday, Newsom called on PG&E executives, shareholders and creditors along with wildfire victims

to meet with him. Newsom said he is confident the meeting will occur.

However, representatives for the largest groups of bondholders and shareholders did not respond to a request for comment.

PG&E spokesman James Noonan indicated the company would participate.

“We welcome the governor’s and the state’s engagement on these vital matters and share the same goal of fairly resolving the wildfire claims and exiting the Chapter 11 process as quickly as possible,” he said.

It’s unclear how the state could take over PG&E in the event it does not meet the June 30th deadline.

San Francisco has offered to purchase portions of PG&E’s equipment for \$2.5 billion so it could operate parts of the power system on its own.

Asked if taxpayers would purchase the company, Newsom said: “It’s more complicated than that.”

“It’s not writing a check,” he said. “This is not plan ‘A,’ but it is a plan. We would be irresponsible not to scope that plan. So we’re not going to sit back and hope and hope an expectation that everything else works out.”