

Despite risks, Dems say they’re all in on impeachment probe

By **LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had a simple question for fellow Democrats behind closed doors Wednesday, addressing them as the Judiciary Committee considered articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump in an initial hearing that erupted in sharply partisan exchanges.

“Are you ready?” she asked rank-and-file lawmakers.

The answer was a resounding “yes.”

The Democrats also gave a standing ovation to Rep. Adam Schiff, whose Intelligence Committee report cataloged potential grounds for impeachment, overwhelmingly indicating they want to continue to press the inquiry rather than slow its advance or call a halt for fear of political costs in next year’s congressional elections.

The meeting was described by people familiar with it, who were unauthorized to discuss it by name and were granted anonymity.

Pelosi, once reluctant to engage in a strictly party-line impeachment proceeding, is now leading colleagues to a likely partisan vote after a House investigation found that Trump seriously misused the power of his office to seek foreign interference in the U.S. election and then obstructed Congress in its efforts to investigate.

Meanwhile, Trump’s team fanned out across the Capitol with Vice President Mike Pence meeting with House Republicans and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell gathering GOP lawmakers from his chamber with White House officials to prepare for what could be the first presidential impeach-

ment trial in a generation.

Some of those from the White House still believe the unpopularity of impeachment in areas where Trump is popular will prevent a vote in the House. That seems unlikely.

Elsewhere at the Capitol, Republicans at the Judiciary Committee hearing protested the proceedings as unfair, the dredging up of unfounded allegations as part of an effort to undo the 2016 election and remove Trump from office.

“You just don’t like the guy,” said Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia, the top Republican on the panel.

Trump, attending a NATO meeting in London called the hearing a “joke” and doubted many people would watch “because it’s going to be boring.”

Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., had a different view as he gaveled open the session.

The matter is serious and “the facts before us are undisputed,” he declared.

Pelosi has said no decision has been made on whether there will be a House vote on impeaching Trump. But a vote by Christmas appears increasingly likely with the release of the 300-page report by Democrats on the Intelligence Committee that found “serious misconduct” by the president.

Democrats could begin drafting articles of impeachment in a matter of days, with a Judiciary Committee vote next week.

At the heart of the inquiry is Trump’s July 25 phone call asking Ukraine for a “favor,” to investigate rival Democrats including Joe Biden. Trump at the time was withholding \$400 million in military aid from the ally, which faced an aggressive Russia on its border.

Nadler said the phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wasn’t

the first time Trump sought a foreign power to influence American elections, noting Russian interference in 2016.

“We cannot wait for the election to address the present crisis,” Nadler said. “The president has shown us his pattern of conduct. If we do not act to hold him in check, now, President Trump will almost certainly try again to solicit interference in the election for his personal political gain.”

White House Counsel Pat Cipollone, who has declined for now to participate in the House proceedings, relayed that Trump sees no need for a Senate trial but is eager to have his say.

At Wednesday’s session, three legal experts called by Democrats said impeachment was merited.

Noah Feldman, a Harvard Law School professor, said he considered it clear that the president’s conduct met the definition of “high crimes and misdemeanors.” Pamela Karlan, a Stanford Law School professor and former Obama administration Justice Department official, said the president’s action constituted an especially serious abuse of power “because it undermines democracy itself.”

“If what we’re talking about is not impeachable,” said Michael Gerhardt, a University of North Carolina law professor, “then nothing is impeachable.”

The only Republican witness, Jonathan Turley, a law professor at George Washington University, dissented. He said the Democrats were bringing a “slipshod impeachment” case against the president, but he didn’t excuse Trump’s behavior.

“It is not wrong because President Trump is right,” Turley said. “A case for impeachment could be made, but it cannot be made on this record.”

Port updates cruise ship marketing agreement

Conner cited for ethics violations

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Astorian

The Port of Astoria has signed a new professional services agreement with Bruce Conner, the agency’s cruise ship marketer, after he faced ethics violations with the state over allegations he used the position to benefit his company, Sundial Travel.

Conner is largely credited with turning Astoria into a cruise ship destination over the past decade. While marketing Astoria to cruise lines, Conner also has exclusive agreements to sell passengers shore excursions on board the vessels. Newer, smaller tour providers like Lori Beth Kulp, of Lor’s Tours, and Bob Vinatieri, of Astoria Tours, have called foul.

Kulp filed complaints with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. The commission concluded that Conner took “official actions such as posting descriptions of his company’s shore excursions on the Port of Astoria’s website and communicating with cruise line shore excursion managers to gain support for a Port of Astoria policy that had the effect of prohibiting other tour operators from competing.”

The Ethics Commission charged Conner with seven violations of public disclosure law: one for the improper use of confidential information, three for using his official position for financial gain and three for not disclosing conflicts of interest.

Conner faced up to \$5,000 per violation, but settled with the state and paid \$3,500 overall, based on the seriousness, length and monetary value



Bruce Conner

associated with the violations.

The new professional services agreement with Conner, the first since 2014, pays him \$2,100 a month and reimburses his expenses related to marketing for the Port. It lasts a year and will extend automatically in six-month periods unless either party provides 30-day’s notice.

The agreement specifies that Conner “shall not directly promote or market any specific company, person, or business in which contractor or any relative of contractor has a personal financial interest.”

Matt McGrath, the director of operations at the Port, said Conner has been communicating by email every time he has a potential conflict of interest.

Commissioner Scott McClaine raised concerns over the open-ended nature of the agreement and Conner’s dual role with the Port and his company.

“It is my thought that this position might be better served by someone not as closely tied in with the Port as Mr. Conner,” he said. “It looks to me like someone with a master’s degree in business or that’s in Portland or Seattle or St. Paul (Minnesota) could do this effectively, and not have any potential conflicts. That way you can treat everybody fairly ... versus even having the appearance of impropriety, of any favoritism.”

McClaine wanted periodic reviews of the Port’s relationship with Conner and any potential conflicts of interest. The Port is trying to keep the contract low-maintenance, allowing the agency to let Conner go with a month’s notice whenever it needs to go in a different direction, McGrath said.

“It’s just meant to be able to keep him operating as the

marketer until the Port decides to go in a different direction,” he said.

Conner holds a similar cruise ship marketing position with the Humboldt Bay Harbor District, Eureka and Humboldt County in Northern California. He is the vice president for Cruise the West, a marketing association for nine West Coast ports, including Astoria and Humboldt Bay.

McClaine questioned whether Conner is solely marketing the Port when he goes to cruise line conferences. If not, the Port should cost-share his trips with the other organizations he might be marketing, he said.

Conner represents all Cruise the West ports at cruise line conferences, McGrath said.

Commissioner Frank Spence, a member of Clatsop Cruise Hosts and a champion for the economic impact of visiting cruise ships, bristled at McClaine’s line of questioning.

“You’re into presumptions and assumptions,” Spence said. “And the two words that get people in trouble the most is ‘presume’ and ‘assume.’”

The Ethics Commission has addressed concerns with Conner, Spence said.

“The proof of the pudding in his efforts is the fact that next year we will have a record 33 cruise ships coming in here,” he said. “This represents millions of dollars — not only to the Port, (but) to the county, to the state of Oregon.”

Dirk Rohne, the president of the Port Commission, said the new operating agreement is the answer to address the issues that have been raised about Conner.

The Port Commission unanimously approved the new agreement.

Conner could not immediately be reached for comment.



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