

Split Senate acquits Trump of impeachment

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

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump won impeachment acquittal Wednesday in the U.S. Senate, bringing to a close only the third presidential trial in American history with votes that split the country, tested civic norms and fed the tumultuous 2020 race for the White House.

A majority of senators expressed unease with Trump’s pressure campaign on Ukraine that resulted in the two articles of impeachment. But the final tallies — 52-48 favoring acquittal of abuse of power, 53-47 of obstruction of Congress’ investigation — fell far short. Two-thirds “guilty” votes would have been needed to reach the Constitution’s bar of high crimes and misdemeanors to convict and remove Trump from office.

The outcome Wednesday followed months of remarkable impeachment proceedings, from Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s House to Mitch McConnell’s Senate, reflecting the nation’s unrelenting partisan divide three years into the Trump presidency.

What started as Trump’s request for Ukraine to “do us a favor” spun into a far-reaching, 28,000-page report compiled by House investigators accusing an American president of engaging in shadow diplomacy that threatened U.S. foreign relations for personal, political gain as he pressured the ally to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden ahead of the next election.

No president has ever been removed by the Senate.

A politically emboldened Trump has eagerly predicted vindication, deploying the verdict as a political anthem in his reelection bid. The president claims he did nothing wrong, decrying the “witch hunt” and “hoax” as extensions of special counsel Robert Mueller’s probe into Russian 2016 campaign interference by those out to get him from the start of his presidency.

Standing before a Congress and a nation sharply divided by impeachment, Trump used his State of the Union address on Tuesday to extol a “Great American Comeback” on his watch, just three years after he took office decrying a land of “American carnage” under



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell leaves the chamber after leading the impeachment acquittal of President Donald Trump at the Capitol on Wednesday.

J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo

*ONLY ONE REPUBLICAN,
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his predecessor.

The partisan discord was on vivid display as the first president to campaign for reelection after being impeached made his case for another term: Republican legislators chanted “Four More Years.” Pelosi ripped up her copy of Trump’s speech as he ended the address.

The Wednesday afternoon vote was swift. With Chief Justice John Roberts presiding over the trial, senators sworn to do “impartial justice” stood at their desks for the roll call and stated their votes — “guilty” or “not guilty.”

On the first article of impeachment, Trump was charged with abuse of power. He was found not guilty. The second, obstruction of Congress, also produced a not guilty verdict.

Only one Republican, Mitt Romney of Utah, the party’s defeated 2012 presidential nominee, broke with the GOP.

Romney choked up as he said he drew on his faith and “oath before God” to announce he would vote guilty on the first charge, abuse of power. He would

vote to acquit on the second.

Both Bill Clinton in 1999 and Andrew Johnson in 1868 drew cross-party support when they were left in office after an impeachment trial. President Richard Nixon resigned rather than face revolt from his own party.

Ahead of voting, some of the most closely watched senators took to the Senate floor to tell their constituents, and the nation, what they had decided. The Senate chaplain opened the trial with daily prayers for the senators, including one Wednesday seeking “integrity.”

Influential GOP Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who is retiring, worried that a guilty verdict would “pour gasoline on the fire” of the nation’s culture wars over Trump. He said the House proved its case but it just didn’t rise to the level of impeachment.

“It would rip the country apart,” Alexander said before his vote.

Other Republicans siding with Trump said it was time to end what McConnell called the “circus” and move on. Trump ally GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham said it was a “sham” designed to destroy

a presidency.

Most Democrats, though, echoed the House managers’ warnings that Trump, if left unchecked, would continue to abuse the power of his office for personal political gain and try to “cheat” again ahead of the the 2020 election.

During the nearly three-week trial, House Democrats prosecuting the case argued that Trump abused power like no other president in history when he pressured Ukraine to investigate Biden and his son, Hunter Biden, ahead of the 2020 election.

They detailed an extraordinary shadow diplomacy run by Trump lawyer Rudy

Giuliani that set off alarms at the highest levels of government. After Trump’s July 25 phone call with Ukraine, Trump temporarily halted U.S. aid to the struggling ally battling hostile Russia at its border. The money was eventually released in September as Congress intervened.

When the House probed Trump’s actions, the president instructed White House aides to defy congressional subpoenas, leading to the obstruction charge.

One key Democrat, Alabama Sen. Doug Jones — perhaps the most endangered politically for reelection in a state where Trump is popular — announced he would vote to convict. “Senators are elected to make tough choices,” Jones said.

Questions from the Ukraine matter continue to swirl. House Democrats may yet summon former national security adviser John Bolton to testify about revelations from his forthcoming book that offer a fresh account of Trump’s actions. Other eyewitnesses and documents are almost sure to surface.

In closing arguments for the trial the lead prosecutor, Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., appealed to senators’ sense of decency, that “right matters” and “truth matters” and that Trump “is not who you are.”

“The president’s basic lack of character, his willingness to cheat in the election — he’s not going to stop,” Schiff told The Associated Press on Wednesday, predicting more revelations would become public. “It’s not going to change, which means that we are going

to have to remain eternally vigilant.”

Pelosi was initially reluctant to launch impeachment proceedings against Trump when she took control of the House after the 2018 election, dismissively telling more liberal voices that “he’s not worth it.”

Trump and his GOP allies in Congress argue that Democrats have been trying to undercut him from the start.

But a whistleblower complaint of his conversation with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy set off alarms. The call had been placed the day after Mueller announced the findings of his Russia probe.

When Trump told Pelosi in September that the call was perfect, she was stunned. “Perfectly wrong,” she said. Days later, the speaker announced the formal impeachment inquiry.

The result was the quickest, most partisan impeachment in U.S. history, with no Republicans joining the House Democrats to vote for the charges, though one GOP congressman left the party and voted for impeachment and two Democrats joined Republicans to oppose. The Republican Senate kept up the pace with the fastest trial ever, and the first with no witnesses or deliberations.

Trump’s legal team with star attorney Alan Dershowitz made the sweeping, if stunning, assertion that even if the president engaged in the quid pro quo as described, it is not impeachable, because politicians often view their own political interest with the national interest.



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