

House speeds to impeach Trump

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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Poised to impeach, the House sped ahead on Monday with plans to oust President Donald Trump from office, warning he is a threat to democracy and pushing the vice president and Cabinet to act first in an extraordinary effort to remove Trump in the final days of his presidency.

Trump faces a single charge — “incitement of insurrection” — after the deadly U.S. Capitol riot in an impeachment resolution that the House will begin debating Wednesday.

At the same time, the FBI warned ominously on Monday of potential armed protests in Washington and many states by Trump loyalists ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20. In a dark foreshadowing, the Washington Monument was being closed to the public amid the threats of disruption.

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said he was stepping down from his post on Monday, days after criticizing Trump over the riot at the Capitol. The Department of Homeland Security is setting increased inauguration security measures in motion earlier than scheduled, citing an “evolving security landscape” leading up to the event.

It all adds up to the stunning final moments for Trump's presidency as Democrats and a growing number of Republicans declare that he is unfit for office and could do more damage after inciting a mob that violently ransacked the Capitol last Wednesday.

“President Trump gravely endangered the security of the United States and its institutions of Government,” reads the four-page impeachment bill.

“He will remain a threat to national security, democracy, and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office,” it reads.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is summoning lawmakers back to Washington for votes, and Democrats aren't the only ones who say Trump needs to go. A number of House Republicans may vote to impeach him, while others at least want to vote for censure. Former GOP Speaker John Boehner said “it's time” for Trump to resign.

Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, of Pennsylvania, joined GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski, of Alaska, over the weekend in calling for Trump to “go away as soon as possible.”

As security tightened, Biden said Monday he was “not afraid” of taking the oath of office outside — as is traditionally done at the Capitol's west steps, one of the areas where people stormed the building.

As for the rioters, Biden said, “It is critically important that there'll be a real serious focus on holding those folks who engaged in sedition and threatening the lives, defacing



Members of the National Guard stand inside anti-scaling fencing that surrounds the U.S. Capitol on Sunday.

public property, caused great damage — that they be held accountable.”

Biden said he's had conversations with senators ahead of a possible impeachment trial, which some have worried would cloud the opening days of his administration. The president-elect suggested splitting the Senate's time, perhaps “go a half day on dealing with impeachment, a half day on getting my people nominated and confirmed in the Senate, as well as moving on the package” for more COVID-19 relief.

As Congress briefly resumed on Monday, an uneasiness swept government. More lawmakers tested positive for COVID-19 after sheltering during the siege. And new security officials were quickly installed after the Capitol police chief and others were ousted in the fallout from the extraordinary attack on the iconic dome of democracy.

Pending impeachment, Democrats called on Vice President Mike Pence and the Cabinet to invoke constitutional authority under the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office before Inauguration Day.

Their House resolution was blocked by Republicans. However, the full House is to hold a roll call vote on it Tuesday, and it is expected to pass.

After that, Pelosi said Pence will have 24 hours to respond. Next would be the impeachment proceedings.

Pence has given no indication he is ready to proceed on a course involving the 25th Amendment and a vote by a majority of the Cabinet to oust Trump before Jan. 20. No member of the Cabinet has publicly called for Trump to be removed from office in that way.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, a Maryland Democrat, offered the resolution during Monday's brief session. It was blocked by Rep. Alex Mooney, a West Virginia Republican, as other

GOP lawmakers stood by him.

Pelosi said the Republicans were enabling Trump's “unhinged, unstable and deranged acts of sedition to continue. Their complicity endangers America, erodes our Democracy, and it must end.”

The impeachment bill from Reps. David Cicilline, of Rhode Island, Ted Lieu, of California, Jamie Raskin, of Maryland, and Jerrold Nadler, of New York, draws from Trump's own false statements about his election defeat to Biden.

Judges across the country, including some nominated by Trump, have repeatedly dismissed cases challenging the election results, and Attorney General William Barr, a Trump ally, has said there was no sign of widespread fraud.

The impeachment legislation also details Trump's pressure on state officials in Georgia to “find” him more votes, and his White House rally ahead of the Capitol siege, in which he encouraged thousands of supporters last Wednesday to “fight like hell” and march to the building.

The mob overpowered police, broke through security lines and windows and rampaged through the Capitol, forcing lawmakers to scatter as they were finalizing Biden's victory over Trump in the Electoral College.

While some have questioned impeaching the president so close to the end of his term, Democrats and others argue he must be held accountable and prevented from holding future public office. He would be the only president twice impeached.

House Democrats have been considering a strategy to delay for 100 days sending articles of impeachment to the Senate for trial, to allow Biden to focus on other priorities.

There is precedent for pursuing impeachment after an official leaves office. In 1876, during President Ulysses Grant's administration, War

Secretary William Belknap was impeached by the House the day he resigned, and the Senate convened a trial months later. He was acquitted.

Some Republicans warn against impeachment.

“They're not only going to create bad feelings in Congress, they're really going to create tremendously bad feelings in America,” said Rep. Jeff Van Drew, of New Jersey.

Still, other Republicans might be supportive.

Nebraska Sen. Ben Sasse said he would take a look at any articles that the House sent over. Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, a frequent Trump critic, said he would “vote the right way” if the matter were put in front of him.

Cicilline, leader of the House effort to draft impeachment articles, tweeted Monday that “we now have the votes to impeach,” including 213 cosponsors and private commitments.

Associated Press writers Alan Fram, Ellen Knickmeyer, Tom Beaumont and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

Wyden: Aid programs need to be untethered

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“We're going to get \$2,000 checks out to Americans as soon as we can,” Wyden said. “We're going to get those \$600 federal unemployment benefits back. We've got folks who are hurting desperately — they're not able to pay their rent, buy their groceries, get medicine for their kids.”

Wyden said the political change in Washington, D.C., will reveal the reality the senator believes Trump and U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have tried to hide: The COVID-19 crisis is deep, hard and won't be under control for months, even a year.

“These safety net issues are so essential, they should not depend on whim of one political person,” Wyden said of McConnell. “There was a strategy before not to admit how bad things are.”

Congress is also ready to help Biden, a Democrat, lift the fog of conflicting policies and statements about a pandemic that has killed more than 370,000 Americans. Democrats believe they will get significant Republican support for a major push to get vaccines into the arms of Americans as swiftly as possible.

“Deployment without delays,” Wyden said.

Because Trump at first dismissed, then downplayed, the exploding spread of the virus, Wyden said the president could never get beyond what the crisis meant to him personally. Instead of being chastened by his own brush with COVID, Trump told Americans not to let it control their lives, and he personally rarely wore a mask.

Even when the Trump-initiated Operation Warp Speed helped scientists create two vaccines in less than a year, with more

to come, Trump was still holding parties and large rallies with supporters who did not wear masks, spreading the infection.

“He didn't want to do the hard work needed,” Wyden said.

Biden has promised a science-based policy led by Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Under Trump, Fauci found his advice often ignored and endured the president's promotion of quack cures and personal opposition to the national effort to have Americans wear masks in public.

One of the hardest changes will be to level with Americans that COVID-19 will kill more people and cripple more businesses for much of 2021.

“It is hard to turn away from the reality,” Wyden said. “The fact is we have a coronavirus spike that is greater than spring. We're starting to get projections of other mutations of the virus.”

Wyden said that's why aid programs need to be untethered to artificial end dates created by guesses on how bad the situation will be months or a year down the road.

On a practical level, that means federal aid to people, businesses, cities and states will be needed for as long as it takes. He said he would like to see as many programs as possible be self-renewing until metrics showing a strong, sustained recovery is in place before they would be shut down or curtailed.

“You don't want people constantly worried about what is next,” the senator said.

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