

House panel debates late for historic Trump impeachment vote

By LISA MASCARO AND MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Judiciary Committee lumbered toward a historic vote late Thursday night to approve articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, splitting sharply along party lines in a grueling session. It was expected to end with charges being sent to the full House for action next week, before the holidays.

The committee, made up of some of the most strident Democrats and Republicans in Congress, clashed for more than 13 hours as Republicans

insisted on lengthy debate on amendments designed to kill the two formal charges. They kept up the late-night endeavor though they won no votes from the majority Democrats and had no hope of winning any.

Trump is accused, in the first article, of abusing his presidential power by asking Ukraine to investigate his 2020 rival, Joe Biden, while holding military aid as leverage, and, in the second, of obstructing Congress by blocking the House’s efforts to probe his actions.

Trump is only the fourth U.S. president to face impeachment proceedings and the first to be running

for re-election at the same time. He insists he did nothing wrong and blasts the Democrats’ effort daily as a sham and harmful to America. Republican allies seem unwavering in their opposition to expelling Trump, and he claims to be looking ahead to swift acquittal in a Senate trial.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi sounded confident Thursday that Democrats, who once tried to avoid a solely partisan effort, will have the votes to impeach the president without Republican support when the full House votes. But she said it was up to individual lawmakers to weigh the evidence.

“The fact is we take an oath

to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States,” Pelosi told reporters. “No one is above the law; the president will be held accountable for his abuse of power and for his obstruction of Congress.”

The outcome poses potentially serious political consequences for both parties ahead of the 2020 elections, with Americans deeply divided over whether the president indeed conducted impeachable acts and if it should be up to Congress, or the voters, to decide whether he should remain in office.

The president has refused to participate in the proceedings, tweeting criticisms as he did Thursday from

the sidelines, mocking the charges against him in the House’s nine-page resolution as “impeachment light.” But Pelosi said the president was wrong and the case against him is deeply grounded.

Democrats contend that Trump has engaged in a pattern of misconduct toward Russia dating back to the 2016 election campaign that special counsel Robert Mueller investigated. And they say his dealings with Ukraine have benefited its aggressive neighbor Russia, not the U.S., and he must be prevented from “corrupting” U.S. elections again and cheating his way to a second term next year.

“It is urgent,” Pelosi said.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said late Thursday on Fox News, “There is zero chance the president will be removed from office.” He said he was hoping to have no GOP defections in the Senate trial next year.

The Judiciary Committee session drew out over two days, with both sides appealing to Americans’ sense of history — Democrats describing a duty to stop what one called the president’s “constitutional crime spree” and Republicans decrying what one said was the “hot garbage” impeachment and what it means for the future of the country.

Depot: CDA’s plan would include picnic area and information kiosks

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for industrial development.

“I’m presenting a minority report,” he told the board.

The CDA — a partnership of several local governments — negotiated for months with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to come up with the official programmatic agreement submitted to the Army. The agreement to protect or mitigate culturally significant sites must be signed by the Army, the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.

The CDA’s plan is to preserve the branch of the Oregon Trail that runs through the northern part of the depot as part of the wildlife preserve that will be run by the tribes. For the fork on the southern side, a 200-yard section would be preserved and a parking lot, picnic area, restrooms and educational kiosks would be added to encourage the public to visit and learn about the trail.

Baskins said the Oregon Historic Trails Advisory Council’s proposal would be to place kiosks on a small section in a different area of the depot, and then to preserve just shy of a mile of the southern trail.

“We ask that you do not



Contributed photo

Oregon Trail ruts can be seen on the southern portion of the former Umatilla Chemical Depot.

expend money on parking lots, restrooms or a picnic area,” he said. “Protect it by covenant and simply let it be.”

He said there could be an option to bring school children out on scheduled field trips, but not allowing general public access would help with security issues with the trail being so close to National Guard facilities.

Don Russell, chair of the CDA board, said he hasn’t been able to see any visible signs of the trail when he has gone out and looked at it. He questioned why it was so

important to save so much of the trail that settlers of European decent walked on, when there probably wasn’t a single portion of the depot that hadn’t been crossed by ancestors of area tribes.

“What makes this piece of history more valuable?” he said.

Board member Kim Puzey said regardless of his personal opinions on trail preservation, Congress has mandated that if the land is transferred from the Army to local control, the CDA must use that land for

economic development.

Smith said the CDA had gone “above and beyond” what was expected in planning to preserve as much of the trail ruts as it plans to.

Baskins said he understood the importance of the jobs that major industrial development on the site would bring, but he felt “honor bound” to do what he could to persuade the Army to require more preservation, and to require a binding covenant that would apply to any future owners of the land as well.

During Thursday’s 2-1/2-

hour meeting, board members also discussed a variety of other topics in preparation for receiving the depot land after a programmatic agreement is approved. An engineer from Anderson Perry & Associates presented possible road configurations along the industrial part of the depot, which could be paid for using the \$9 million the CDA has been given by the Legislature using funds from the 2017 transportation package.

The money is only available for transportation uses, however. Smith reminded the board that they will need to find alternative sources of funding for water, sewer and electricity installed under the new roads.

He said they also need to have further discussions on how to develop the water rights and wells that will transfer to the CDA along with the property.

J.R. Cook, of Northeast Oregon Water Association, said he was glad to hear Smith acknowledge the issue was “complicated.” Area farmers didn’t want to stand in the way of the transfer of the depot, he said, but they were concerned about what pulling more groundwater out of the aquifers would do to the depot’s neighbors.

“I do get concerned about paper rights, and people think-

ing that paper rights mean the water’s there,” he said.

When the CDA receives the depot it will also inherit a large cache of equipment, from tools to construction vehicles.

Smith said unfortunately the Army has just let the vehicles sit for years, so he is not sure how usable they would be, but noted that Umatilla County Fire District 1 had asked for a backhoe, forklift and flatbed trailer for training purposes. The Port of Morrow is also interested in a large generator in exchange for in-kind services to the CDA. And other equipment could possibly be used to set up a career technical education center for area students.

Board member Bill Elfering said he would like a professional to appraise the vehicles and generators before the CDA considers making any deals to give them away — something other board members agreed with and Smith said he would do.

The board wrapped up its meeting with an executive session to discuss real estate negotiations, after which they approved a motion directing Smith to work with the CTUIR and Innergex Renewable Energy on a potential agreement related to the depot.

Changes: ‘It’s an old facility. It hasn’t kept up with the new requirements’

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maximum daily load stays below 69.9 degrees.

What’s changed since the last time Pendleton renewed its permit with DEQ is a federal court ruling that lowered the criteria to 64.4 degrees to protect salmon habitat.

Van Meter said that’s difficult to do on the Umatilla River, especially during the warm weather months from May to October.

Although temperature standards are still up in the air, the city expects the state to address temperature rules on the Umatilla River by 2027.

If DEQ does require the lower temperature standard, the city wants to be prepared, but Van Meter said some solutions, like chilling the water before it’s discharged into the river, might be too expensive.

Instead, city staff and their consultants are recommending the city reduce



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Wastewater flows through a set of aeration basins at the wastewater treatment plant in Pendleton on Thursday afternoon.

what it discharges into the river.

“We’re not recommend-

ing to get out of the river for six months,” Van Meter said. “What we’re saying

is, maximize the amount of water you can put in the river, and then have another

plan. Try to diversify your investment portfolio.”

Instead of discharging into the Umatilla during warm-weather months, Patterson said the city could direct wastewater to a green belt around Interstate 84 or transport the sewage elsewhere for agricultural uses.

But the wastewater treatment plant’s discharge isn’t the only thing at the plant in need of potential upgrades.

With the sewer plant in continuous operation at the confluence of the Umatilla River and McKay Creek since the early 1950s, Wastewater Superintendent Mark Milne said some of the infrastructure at the facility is starting to show its age while other parts are in need of upgrades.

“It’s an old facility,” he said. “It hasn’t kept up with the new requirements. It’s pretty expensive. It’s not cheap to upgrade the building.”

Over the next 20 years,

Murraysmith recommended the city spend \$22.1 million on wastewater treatment plant repairs and improvements.

All the projects are separated into four phases, and Patterson said the \$2 million first phase, which includes money for secondary digester and gas storage, can be paid for with existing city funds.

But should the city decide to change the way it handles its sewer discharge, Patterson said the costs of storing and transporting wastewater haven’t been fully calculated.

Patterson said it will be more expensive than what the city does now, but it’s too soon to see how that will affect sewer rates.

The city is in the midst of a five-year rate hike that’s set to end in 2020. Once it ends, Patterson said the city will reanalyze sewer rates to determine whether they’ll meet the needs of the system.

Poverty: 126 students recorded as homeless last year, 20 more than year prior

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(2019), after being eligible in (2018), were all ineligible because their poverty level decreased to below 20 percent,” an official from the U.S. Department of Education stated in an email to the *East Oregonian*.

The U.S. Department of Education uses the most current available data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates available to determine which agencies make the cut.

This year’s funding was

determined by 2016 estimates, which showed a decline in poverty rates that some administrators found surprising.

In Hermiston, the 2015 poverty estimates put the district at 24.4% of students coming from low income families. The 2016 estimates put that number just under 17%.

Next year’s eligibility will be determined by 2017’s poverty rates, according to the U.S. Department of Education. In 2017, Hermiston’s estimated rate showed just over 17% of students came

from families with incomes below the poverty line.

“But our need seems to be growing,” Browning said. And according to 2018 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, she’s not wrong. The district’s poverty rate neared 20% last year.

Last year, the Morrow County School District received an allotment of more than \$33,000 from the Rural and Low Income Schools grant. And according to Superintendent Dirk Dirksen, the district has received funds since he took on his current position in 2011.

“We use the rural schools grant for teacher professional development as well as Friday school and summer school activities that we do,” he said. “As we process in working through this, it’s kind of a balancing game.”

Dirksen said the district will dip into general funds, and hopefully utilize Student Success Act funding to fill the gap.

“It was a surprise to me,” he said. “I know the Title programs are always up and down.”

Dirksen pointed out

that five of the district’s schools have high rates of low income students that make them part of Oregon’s Community Eligibility Provisions program. The CEP makes lunch free for all students at those schools.

“Homelessness is obviously up,” he added.

The district recorded 126 students as homeless last year, an increase of 20 from the year prior.

Ultimately, 24 Oregon school districts were allocated Rural and Low Income Schools funding. Last year,

the state allocated funds to 46.

Many of the districts eligible for the grant this year, including Athena-Weston, were also eligible for the Small, Rural School Achievement Program for districts with smaller populations and opted for that funding instead, according to the Oregon Department of Education.

Poverty estimates for 2018 from the U.S. Census Bureau put Oregon’s poverty level below the 17% national average, at 14.3%. Umatilla County’s 2018 estimate was at 19.8%.