

Public impeachment hearings to escalate political warfare in Washington

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Today marks the beginning of the public phase of the Democratic Party's impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump. The House Intelligence Committee, which is leading the inquiry, will take testimony this week from three still-serving State Department officials who defied the White House ban on cooperation with the inquiry and gave closed-door testimony last month.

All three broadly supported the Democrats' allegations that Trump abused the powers of his office and undermined national security by withholding military aid from Ukraine and putting off a White House meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in an effort to bully Kiev into announcing a corruption investigation into former Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter, as well as a probe of alleged Ukrainian interference in the 2016 US election. The claim is that Trump illicitly solicited an intervention by Zelensky in the 2020 election against Biden, his potential Democratic opponent.

The younger Biden collected \$50,000 a month for sitting on the board of the large Ukrainian gas company Burisma while his father was in charge of Ukraine policy for the Obama administration.

Scheduled to testify today are William Taylor, the top US diplomat in Ukraine, and George Kent, deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian Affairs. On Friday, Marie Yovanovitch, the former US ambassador to Ukraine, will testify.

In their closed-door depositions, Taylor and Kent backed the charge that Trump ordered congressionally mandated military aid to Ukraine held up in order to pressure Kiev to investigate the Democrats. Yovanovitch will testify on Friday about the campaign led by Trump's personal lawyer, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, to obtain her recall to Washington, which was carried out on the orders of Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last April.

The intensity of the impeachment conflict is indicated by the decision of both the cable and broadcast networks to suspend their regular programming and televise the hearings from gavel to gavel. This is a bitter conflict within the ruling

class and the state between two right-wing factions that have been battling one another over foreign policy questions since Trump's nomination as the Republican candidate for president in the summer of 2016.

There is no democratic or progressive content to the Democrats' impeachment drive. They are appealing not to the broad popular opposition to the fascistic Trump administration, but rather to powerful sections of the intelligence, military and foreign policy establishment that oppose Trump on the grounds that he is insufficiently belligerent toward Russia and resistant to maintaining and expanding US military operations in Syria and Afghanistan.

This is underscored by the three questions released last week by House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff as the basis for the televised hearings. They concern whether Trump requested in a July 25 phone call with President Zelensky that the Ukrainian government initiate investigations into his political rivals in the US; whether Trump used his powers as president to induce Ukraine to launch the investigations; and whether Trump and his top aides tried to obstruct, suppress or cover up information related to the first two issues.

Trump's real attacks on democratic rights and the social interests of working people are excluded from the impeachment inquiry, including his persecution of immigrants, his appeals to racist and fascistic forces, and his rejection of congressional oversight and arrogation of quasi-dictatorial powers.

The impeachment inquiry was sparked by a complaint to the intelligence agencies' inspector general about the July 25 telephone call from a so-called whistleblower, a CIA analyst then serving on the Ukrainian desk at the White House National Security Council, then headed by since-fired war hawk John Bolton. He was been named by right-wing media as Eric Ciaramella.

On Tuesday, House Republicans released an 18-page memo outlining their strategy for opposing impeachment and intervening in the public hearings. It lists four points that, it claims, "undercut the Democrat impeachment

narrative that President Trump leveraged US security assistance and a presidential meeting to force Ukraine to investigate the president's political rivals."

First, the July 25 call "shows no conditionality or evidence of pressure."

Second, "President Zelensky and President Trump have both said there was no pressure on the call."

Third, "The Ukrainian government was not aware of the hold on US assistance" at the time of the July 25 call.

Fourth, "The security assistance hold was lifted on September 11" without the Ukrainian government having announced the investigations.

In addition to repeating Republican claims that the impeachment inquiry process is undemocratic and an illegitimate attack on the prerogatives of the executive branch, the memo reiterates charges of corruption in relation to Hunter Biden and cites press reports of collaboration between the Ukrainian government and the Clinton campaign during the 2016 election.

"Democrats want to impeach President Trump because unelected and anonymous bureaucrats disagreed with the president's decisions and were discomforted by his telephone conversation with President Zelensky," the memo states.

Over the weekend, the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, Devin Nunes, sent a letter to Chairman Schiff requesting that a number of additional witnesses be called to testify in public, including Hunter Biden, the whistleblower, Nellie Ohr, a researcher for Fusion GPS, which was hired by the Democratic National Committee to do opposition research on Trump with a focus on Russia, and Alexandra Chalupa, a Ukrainian American activist who worked for the Obama administration and the Democratic National Committee.

Schiff rejected calling Biden or the whistleblower and said the committee would consider the other Republican requests.

The lineup of the Democrats and allied media such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN and NBC with neoconservative war hawks was reflected in the response of right-wing pundit Max Boot to the Republican strategy document.

"All that is left is the tribal loyalty that Republicans, including Republican intellectuals, feel toward a Republican president. They would never make such excuses for a Democrat," he wrote in a *Washington Post* column Tuesday.

Jennifer Rubin echoed the same line in a *Post* column published Tuesday: "Finally, the fact that aid eventually went to Ukraine because the whole incident was coming to light in the media is not a defense for anything. Attempted murder is still a crime; soliciting a bribe does not mean the bribe worked."

All three State Department officials who are testifying this week are avid supporters of the right-wing nationalist regime in Kiev, which was installed in a US-backed and fascist-led coup in 2014, carried out as part of a drive to isolate Russia and reduce it to the status of a semi-colony of US imperialism. In a basic sense, the Democrats' impeachment drive is a continuation of the anti-Russia hysteria that underlay the Mueller investigation into alleged Trump campaign collusion with Moscow, and which has been used to justify internet censorship in the name of combatting "fake news."

The Democrats are not calling to testify parents of children imprisoned as part of Trump's Gestapo-like war on immigrants. Nor are they holding Trump accountable for the thousands of family members of workers and youth killed by police, whose actions Trump regularly praises. Or those impacted by Trump's cuts in food stamps and other social benefits, carried out in part to offset trillions of dollars in tax cuts for the rich.

On the contrary, they are seeking to conduct what amounts to a palace coup in such a manner as to avoid encouraging any growth of working-class opposition to social inequality, war and attacks on democratic rights. They are petrified at the spread of strikes and protests and the growing support for socialism, particularly among young people.

Their aim is to complete the public hearings and turn the inquiry over to the House Judiciary Committee, which is expected to draw up articles of impeachment by the end of this month or the beginning of December. The Democrats want to hold a floor vote on impeachment and give way to a trial in the Republican-controlled Senate, where a two-thirds majority is required to convict and remove the impeached official. With conviction unlikely, the Democrats want to get the process over with prior to the first Democratic primary contest, the Iowa Caucuses on February 3.

It comes as no surprise that impeachment carried out on such a right-wing and pro-war basis has evoked little popular enthusiasm or engagement. A CBS News poll released Tuesday shows the country essentially split on impeachment. A majority of Americans, according to the poll, have negative feelings toward the conduct of both the Democrats and the Republicans in the impeachment crisis.



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