House votes to set aside Hegseth impeachment

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The House of Representatives voted 211-204 Tuesday evening to refer to the Judiciary Committee a resolution to impeach Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, effectively killing the measure for the duration of the lame duck session of Congress, which began this week.

Republicans hold 218 seats in the lame duck House and Democrats 214, with two vacancies and one independent, Kevin Kiley of California, who voted with the Republicans. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, the Republican who drafted the resolution, was the only Republican to vote against referral.

All 203 Democrats who voted opposed the motion, but 11 did not vote. Had eight of them done so, the motion would have failed, and the House would have been compelled to take up the articles of impeachment. The absentees included former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is leaving Congress but appeared at a press conference in Washington the same day.

The Democratic leadership, which had stated its support for impeachment, did not whip the vote, thus allowing it to pass and the impeachment measure stalled.

In January, when the Democrats will hold large majorities in both houses of Congress, they may reintroduce an impeachment resolution, though it is likely to focus on a narrower set of charges than Massie's. Massie is leaving Congress after losing the May Republican primary to a Trump-backed candidate.

The Massie resolution listed eight impeachable offenses. Three concerned the war against Iran, which Massie charged was waged in violation of the War Powers Resolution. The law requires the president to withdraw US forces from hostilities within 60 days, with a 30-day extension, unless Congress authorizes them.

The resolution also condemned the killing of fishermen in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific (labeled "narco-terrorists" by Hegseth without evidence), the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, and the Pentagon effort to bring criminal charges against six Democratic members of Congress for issuing a video appeal to US soldiers not to obey illegal or unconstitutional orders.

Several Republicans had indicated support for removing Hegseth but publicly balked at several of the charges. Don Bacon of Nebraska, who is retiring, said he would vote to impeach Hegseth over his firing of numerous military officers and over cuts in US military aid to Ukraine, but not over Iran.

The impeachment effort is a cynical operation. The Democrats backed Massie's resolution, but the Democrats have ruled out any action against Trump himself. Trump appointed Hegseth, ordered every operation listed in Massie's articles and has just made the fascist Stephen Miller White House chief of staff. Concentrating on Hegseth alone protects the man responsible and leaves the administration's drive to dictatorship untouched.

The actual priority of the incoming Democratic majority is to revive the massive US financial and military commitment to Ukraine, and the Hegseth impeachment is likely to be a component part of their negotiations with the White House. Senate Democrats have already floated Hegseth's ouster as leverage in defense spending talks, according to the *Hill*.

The behind-the-scenes maneuvering is accompanied by stepped-up fascist pronouncements from Trump, Hegseth and other leading figures in the Republican Party.

The morning of the impeachment vote, Hegseth gave a press briefing which consisted of a nonstop diatribe against Massie. While not addressing the main charge brought by Massie, that the US war in Iran was illegal and in violation of the War Powers Act, the Pentagon boss claimed that the impeachment resolution amounted to a criminal complaint against every US soldier who carried out orders from himself and Trump.

The resolution placed "a target on the backs of American warriors by signaling that Congress will undermine their missions in real time," Hegseth claiming. "This is not patriotism," he added. "This is sabotage."

The last charge is particularly provocative, as sabotage of US military operations in wartime would be the basis

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for charges of treason, which carries the death penalty.

"Let's be clear about what this resolution actually does," Hegseth said. "It tells our enemies—Iran, the cartels, every adversary watching—that the United States will actually punish its own warriors and its own civilian leadership."

Hegseth also cited military operations ordered by Democratic presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, effectively declaring that the war crimes of Democrats made it hypocritical for them to charge Republican officials like himself with war crimes.

The news conference was the first Hegseth has held at the Pentagon in six months, as he has rejected any public accountability for US military operations in the Middle East, the Caribbean or anywhere else.

Moreover, journalists reported that they were accosted by a Hegseth security aide, who said that anyone who acted "unprofessionally" would be physically removed. In any case, Hegseth took questions only from pro-Trump right-wing media, while he attacked other corporate-controlled media outlets which reported more critically on the war in Iran.

Shortly after the news conference, Trump posted his support on social media, writing that Hegseth "gets an 'A' PLUS, PLUS, PLUS for his defense against a disgruntled, angry, defeated, former Congressman, Thomas Massie, a TOTAL LOSER!"

Despite these fulminations, there have been numerous media reports that Trump is preparing to dump Hegseth if it suits his purposes in the deal-making with the Democrats. Hegseth has been said to be inquiring about an appointment to the US Senate seat from Tennessee. Republican Senator Marsha Blackburn was elected governor on November 3 and will thus have the power to select her own replacement.



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