

NEWSROOM

Transcript of Pelosi Weekly Press Conference Today

SEPTEMBER 26, 2019 PRESS RELEASE

Washington, D.C. – Speaker Nancy Pelosi held her weekly press conference today in the Capitol Visitor Center. Below are the Speaker's remarks:

Speaker Pelosi. Good morning, everyone.

It's a sad week for our country. Very prayerfully and patriotically, we had to come to a decision to move forward with an impeachment inquiry of the President of the United States.

This is nothing that we take lightly. And, in trying to balance our responsibility to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States in a way that was not divisive in our country but uniting in our country, we wanted to have a fuller understanding of the facts.

Last week, we saw something that removed all doubt as to whether we should move forward, with this distinct change in the body of knowledge that we had on which to make a decision. So when people say to me, 'What made you change my mind?' I didn't change my mind. I've always been on the course of finding the facts as we honor our Constitution.

And the facts are these: that the President of the United States in his actions in a telephone call with a head of state betrayed his oath of office, our national security and the integrity of our elections.

This is about the facts. This is about the Constitution of the United States. And, we have to make judgments in an inquiry as we go forward.

There are some in our Caucus who think, 'Let's just have an impeachment.' No, we have to have an inquiry to further establish the facts. There is no rush to judgment. And, in some ways, we are a jury, open to what might be exculpatory or not.

But, every day the sadness grows because the disregard for our Constitution that the President has becomes more clear.

I'll just read from the complaint, which is now public, but which I saw yesterday when it wasn't. The complaint states the White House tried to 'lock down all records of the call, especially the word-for-word transcript.' That gave the whistleblower reason to believe that they, the White House, 'understood the gravity of what transpired in that call.'

The complaint reports a 'repeated abuse of an electronics record system designed to store classified, sensitive national security information, which the White House used to hide information of a political nature.'

This is a cover-up. This is a cover-up.

Let me just say a word about whistleblowers. First, let me say how proud I am of our Members in our Caucus for the thoughtfulness that they have brought to this. Some with their own timing. Others, like our Freshmen Democratic defense Members with their

beautiful statement earlier in the week, after seeing what their letter alleged about the President.

I also want to salute our six Chairmen. They have done a remarkable job. Adam Schiff is holding forth now.

Chairman Cummings, let me say a word about him. Chairman Cummings is an expert on Inspectors General and on whistleblowers. So, in addition to all of the other oversight responsibility that his Committee has over all of government, in this particular case he has been a great intellectual resource on it.

Whistleblowers play an important role in our government in revealing wrongdoing that they see. I've been an important part of writing bills to protect whistleblowers from retaliation, and that's what we hope to do in this case as well: protect the whistleblower reporting wrongdoing from retaliation.

Mr. Nadler is a master of the Constitution.

Congresswoman Waters, a strategic thinker and has her case before the courts now in the Deutsche Bank case, along with Mr. Schiff, in that case.

Chairman Neal, with his case in the courts on the President's taxes.

Mr. Engel, part of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction in terms of this telephone call, as well.

But, it is an intelligence matter, and it is focused in the Intelligence Committee.

I just want to say again on whistleblowers, whistleblowers are important and the Intelligence Community, specifically, and I use their words, 'has publicly recognized the importance of whistleblowing' in pointing out wrongdoing and the importance of protection of whistleblowers.

So, here we are with another example of violations of the Constitution on the part of the President. A continuing discussion that we've been having with him, and I was very pleased that the Senate voted to reverse their decision to take \$3.6 billion from military construction and spending it on his wall. We will have that vote [tomorrow] for the reversal of that decision.

So, as we go forward and still continue with our day-to-day work, yesterday, we had a big rally. We all wore black to mourn those who have been lost to gun violence. We asked the President to pay attention to that.

I pray for him and his family and their safety. I also pray that he cares about the safety of other people's families in our country.

In the first 200 days, and now it's more, of this Congress, we've passed very significant legislation, consistent with our promise to the American people in last year's campaign For The People agenda: to lower the cost of health care by lowering the cost of prescription drugs, to increase paychecks by building infrastructure of America in a green way, cleaner government. Well, on the first two, prescription drugs and infrastructure, hopefully we can have some bipartisan cooperation. Cleaner government, I don't think so, but we will persist with that.

So, again, with all of the agenda that we have sent over to the Senate, we would hope – we would hope that they would listen to the people where over 90 percent, 90 percent of the American people support commonsense background checks contained in H.R. 8 that is over there. That list goes on.

So, we are doing our work. We are legislating for the good of the American people in a way that tries to find common ground. We are investigating, as is our responsibility. We are litigating. And now, we have no choice but to ask for an impeachment inquiry, based on the President's actions.

Q: Madam Speaker?

Speaker Pelosi. Yes, ma'am.

Q: Thank you. I wondered how this information, this complaint affects the push for impeachment. Many Democrats are saying that they now would like to see at least a vote in the Committee in October on Articles of Impeachment. Does that change your timeline? Does that match up to your timeline?

Speaker Pelosi. Our consensus in our Caucus is that we will proceed under the auspices of where this matter is relevant, and that is in the Intelligence Committee. The timeline relates to how the Committee proceeds, and our timeline will spring from them.

There is consensus, though, in our Caucus, about how we have proceeded and focused. Our oath of office is to protect and defend. This is a national security issue. The actions taken by the President lift this into whole new terrain, a whole level of concern about his lawlessness. So, the timing will relate to the Committee.

Q: And on the content, would you personally like to see potential Articles of Impeachment being drawn up specifically focused on Ukraine?

Speaker Pelosi. We are not talking – the Committees – when the Committee finishes its work, and we have the work that has already been done by other Chairs, there will be some determinations about how we proceed. But, I'm not going to go into that today.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Have you all decided that the impeachment inquiry is going to be narrowed and focused specifically to Ukraine and what the Committees are directed to focus on?

Speaker Pelosi. The Committee – the inquiry and the consensus in our Caucus is that our focus now is on this allegation. Now, we're seeing the evidence of it.

And why the President thinks that this is exculpatory, maybe he doesn't know that word, the President thinks that this proves his innocence, only goes to show how further he doesn't understand right from wrong.

So, it isn't about what we – this is the focus of the moment because this is the charge. All of the other work that relates to abuse of power, ignoring subpoenas of government, of Congress, abuse contempt of Congress by him, those things will be considered later, but right now we're in the investigate, the inquiring stage.

So, that's why I said, let's not make any conclusions about Articles of Impeachment or anything else. We have to get the facts.

Yes, Chad?

Q: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You were the top Democrat on the Intelligence Committee for many years.

Speaker Pelosi. Yes, I was.

Q: And you were part of the, you know, process of writing the statute that created the DNI here.

Speaker Pelosi. Yes.

Q: The DNI testified this morning that this was unprecedented.

Speaker Pelosi. That's right.

Q: And that he had delayed the release of the whistleblower complaint because it was such a unique animal here. He says there was good reason why he did that. Based on your background in intelligence and crafting the DNI statute, is that acceptable to you?

Speaker Pelosi. No. I think what the DNI did was broke the law.

The law is very clear. The DNI 'shall' convey the complaint to the Intelligence Committee – not the whole Congress – to the Intelligence Committee, carefully balanced to protect our intelligence and to protect the whistleblower.

So, he has to convey it. And, if the complainant is coming to the Committee, he or she, whoever the DNI is, is the person who establishes the terms under which they would come to protect our intelligence, and also protect any information that the whistleblower may convey from any Espionage Act charges.

So, this is wrong. And the very idea that the subject of a complaint is who he went to, to find out if it was okay to go forward, I think is wrong.

Q: Do you think there was something nefarious behind that, the reason –

Speaker Pelosi. Maybe – I think it's – you'd have to ask him.

I don't think it's nefarious. I just think it's wrong, and it's against the law.

Yes, Scott?

Q: Is there evidence, Madam Speaker, in this complaint of a cover-up by the White House?

Speaker Pelosi. There is actions that are actions that are a cover-up, yeah.

When you take – when you have a system of electronic storage for information that is specifically for national security purposes and you have something that is self-serving to the President politically and decide it might not be – you might not want people to know and you hide it someplace else, that's a cover-up.

Q: Is there no other explanation for that action?

Speaker Pelosi. It has not only happened that one time. My understanding is that it may have happened before.

But, that's not – whatever other explanation there might be, an explanation is also that it is a cover-up.

And, this is – the President has been engaged in a cover-up all along. Why else would he be obstructing the courts as they have ruled in our favor to release the information about the Deutsche Bank and his records there, the Mazars – his accountant and the records there – taxes and the records there?

And, the whole emoluments issue is not a cover-up, that's self-evident. But, a lot of it still contributes to the idea that the President believes that he is above the law. The law being the Constitution of the United States, which strictly forbids a President from accepting an emolument from a foreign government. And now, he's asking a foreign government to help him in his election.

The President – as I have said, I respect the role of the President is to speak to foreign leaders, and sometimes their conversations have a level of confidentiality that is appropriate. It is not the role of the President to shake down foreign leaders for his own political purpose, using tax – withholding taxpayer money to do so.

Q: Finally, if I may, do you anticipate the Committee calling witnesses from the White House? And what message do you have for the White House?

Speaker Pelosi. I can't speak for the Committee. Scott, I have no – I can't speak for the Committee. That's going to be up to their decision.

Q: What message do you have for the White House regarding cooperation with the Committee?

Speaker Pelosi. Speak truth. Speak truth, but know truth. And believe me, I am very prayerful about this. This is a heavy decision to go down this path.

For some people it was easier. They thought the transgressions were self-evident. I thought we needed more facts to show the American people as to why this was necessary.

But last week, use any metaphor you want – crossing the Rubicon, a new day has dawned, *alea iacta est*, which is what they said when they crossed the Rubicon – any analogy, we are at a different level of lawlessness that is self-evident to the American people, which is clearer than saying the President obstructed Congress because he wouldn't let us see these records.

Because we can't see the records, we can't show the public what the President is hiding. So, as long as he keeps obstructing – and in this case, because of a whistleblower, we have this access – then we have a heightened responsibility to act upon those facts.

But as we go forward, I was seven years – I mean, we talk about my 25 years of Intelligence, I was seven years, longer than anybody in Congress, on the Ethics Committee. And, on the Ethics Committee, we were trained: it's about the facts and the law, and in that case, the Rules of the House. Nothing else matters.

So, if you have disappointment about the President being cowardly about gun violence prevention and not wanting to offend ten percent of the nation who are not as supportive of gun violence, or cruel in terms of Dreamers or trans, or in denial about climate change – the list goes on and on: an opposition to a woman's right to choose, Violence Against Women Act, equal pay for equal work, any of those things – if you have your disagreements with the President, save that for the election. That has nothing to do with the impeachment.

The impeachment are about the facts of his actions and his lawlessness, which he considers a virtue, apparently. He thinks this letter is good, and his – and the Constitution of the United States.

Our Founders, you know the story. Last week, of all days, September 17, Constitution Day: a day we observe and celebrate our Constitution, the beauty of it all, the system of checks and balances; a Bill of Rights; freedom of the press, the guardians of our democracy; the ability to amend the Constitution to expand freedom – thank God they did that. As we observed the adoption of our Constitution, that very day, the word broke of the President's betrayal of that Constitution.

So, it's heartbreaking, but nonetheless, it's our responsibility, because the beauty of the Constitution, the system of checks and balances, three co-equal branches of government which would be a check on each other. And the President declaring, Article II, the Executive Branch, says: 'I can do whatever I want.' That's not what the Constitution says.

Perhaps he is ill-advised, perhaps he doesn't know. But, in any event, we do, and that is that the Article II does not make anyone a king. That's exactly what our Founders avoided. So said Benjamin Franklin when he came out on the Independence Hall steps, and they said, 'Dr. Franklin, what do we have, a monarchy or a Republic?' He said, 'A Republic, if we can keep it.'

It is our responsibility to keep it. And as you've heard me say, many of you, 'The times have found us.' As Thomas Paine said, of our Founders, 'The times have found us.' He said that then. We say it now.

Not that we place ourselves in a category of greatness of our Founders, but in a time of urgency, to protect and defend the Constitution for our democracy that they fought hard to win and brilliantly established in the Constitution of the United States.

Q: Madam Speaker? Just to go back to 'expeditiously.' You have said you would like this process to move 'expeditiously.' Have you given the Committee Chairmen any deadline, or can you say –

Speaker Pelosi. No. No. No, the facts will determine the timeline.

Q: And also, Madam Speaker, you did speak with the President on Tuesday morning before you announced your decision.

Speaker Pelosi. Yes.

Q: Was there anything else on that phone call that was notable or that gave you anything to think about in moving forward?

Speaker Pelosi. Well, when the President called that morning, he called to talk about gun violence protection. And, he said things were really moving and I would be really happy with how the Democrats and Republicans were coming around.

I said, I don't know what Democrats you're talking about. We've sent our bill over, over 200 days ago. A hundred people die a day, 47 of them children or teenagers, and every day that goes by, that list grows.

We had called him, Chuck Schumer and I, a couple Sundays before when it was exactly 200 days. That meant 20,000 people had died. So, I pointed that out to him, and he said, 'Well, we're going to be making progress on this or that.'

But, you know, as I said on that Sunday before, and I said here, 'I pray for your family, Mr. President, for their safety,' and I do. I pray for the President all the time. And, I pray that he will receive an illumination to let him know that he has a responsibility for the safety of other families in our country.

But, in any event, on that particular call he was telling me how well things were moving forward and pretty soon I would hear what he – he and whoever else – were deciding. So, I said I would look forward to that.

Then, he changed the subject to what would be coming next and how perfect his conversation was. How perfect his conversation was with the head of state.

I don't want to go into – I'm telling you what is already in the public domain. I don't have to go too far into a conversation with the President of the United States and the Speaker of the House. That's an historic call. It's an historic call. And, I don't usually go out and say, 'I just had this call and this is what it was about,' unless it's in the public domain, which that is, and I can confirm that.

But, the President didn't seem to see what was wrong. I did remind him of my 25 years in Intelligence and that he was now in my wheelhouse on the subject. So, that's what that was.

Let me just say, in case anybody's interested, we're moving ahead on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. We're again hoping to be on a path, a continuing path to yes. Yesterday, in our Caucus, in the morning, that was the subject: the presentation of our Working Group to our Caucus to hear what some of their observations were back.

Then, in the afternoon, we had a Caucus and we talked about H.R. 3, which is our lower health care – Lower Drug Costs Now legislation, which is receiving rave reviews from everyone except the pharmaceutical industry, which is spending millions of dollars misrepresenting what it is.

But, it's very important. It's going to be transformative. It's going to lower costs, not only for our seniors by giving negotiating power to the Secretary to negotiate for lower prices for Medicare, but that those prices would apply in the private sector as well.

And, it has provisions that would stop the abuse of our paying four, five, six times as much for the same prescription drug as are sold in other countries. It puts a cap on what seniors will be required to pay for prescription drugs that is much less than where it is now, less than what the Senate is proposing.

So, it will be transformative, and it will be acted upon by the Committees of jurisdiction: Richie Neal in Ways and Means, Frank Pallone, doing a great job in Energy and Commerce and Bobby Scott in the Education and Labor Committee.

This is very, very important, and some of you have heard me say that on the campaign trail I've seen grown men cry because of the cost of prescription drugs and how debilitating it is to them both from a health standpoint, if they can't afford the drugs, but also from a financial health standpoint.

So, we continue to move forward on meeting the needs of the American people and making progress for them. And that's what's important to them, what we do and how it affects their daily lives. So, that's our responsibility.

At the same time, we take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. We can do both.

Thank you.

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