

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Trump says he released aid to Ukraine because Rob Portman asked

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Amid the impeach inquiry, President Trump says Ohio Sen. Rob Portman can back him up on why he delayed release of aid to Ukraine.

Facing an impeachment inquiry over a telephone call with the president of Ukraine, President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Ohio GOP Sen. Rob Portman can back up his account of events.

The Democrat-led House is probing whether Trump delayed congressionally approved U.S. military aid to Ukraine to pressure the country's president to investigate a Democratic political rival, former Vice President Joe Biden, and his son Hunter.

Trump said in a news conference Wednesday that Portman can attest that the eventual release of the money was not conditioned on receiving any favor from Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, but rather was delayed over Trump's concerns about Europe's lack of financial support for Ukraine.

Trump account, according to the official White House transcript: "I said the following, and I said this loud and clear to everybody — and in fact, Rob Portman backed me up, and there's nobody more honorable than Rob Portman of Ohio.

"Because he called up — 'Please, let the money go.' I said, 'Rob, I hate being the country that's always giving money. When Ukraine helps Europe and the European countries far more than they help us. They're like a wall between

Russia and Europe. They're like a wall. They're like a big, wide beautiful wall.'

"And, he said, 'You know what, but it's important.' In fact, he came out and he said that. That was my only reason. Because I don't like being the sucker country. We were the sucker country for years and years. We're not the sucker country anymore.

"But I gave the money because Rob Portman and others called me and asked. But I don't like to be the sucker, and European countries are helped far more than we are, and those countries should pay more to help Ukraine."

Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, who was in Columbus on Wednesday, said Trump's own words as captured in the reconstruction of his July 25 call with Zelenskiy justify House Democrats' impeachment inquiry.

"President Trump made the case when he acknowledged that he held up the \$400 million that Congress planned to send to the Ukrainians to fight the Russians, and he said 'I want a favor' as he held up that money. So the president's acknowledged that he did something that no president has done before," Brown said.

"It's clear the president lied about things, it's clear the president tried to get something personal for himself and his campaign in exchange for doing his job as commander in chief."

The moment of truth might come for GOP senators if the Senate is asked to remove him from office, Brown said.

"I think that's the question. How much courage do my colleagues have? How much patriotism and love of country do they have? How much strength do they have to do the right thing when the time comes — if the time comes?"

Ohio Democratic Party Chairman David Pepper said in a statement, "It's obvious from the timeline of events and the president's statement (Wednesday) that Rob Portman was intimately involved in the conversations between Donald Trump, U.S. officials and Ukrainian officials as Trump withheld vital funding from that nation and asked them to help with his own personal agenda. It's time for full transparency from Rob Portman — what did he know about the growing Ukraine scandal, and when did he know it?"

Portman spokeswoman Emily Benavides said Trump's latest statement "is entirely consistent with what Rob told numerous media outlets last week."

Portman, a co-founder and co-chairman of the Senate Ukraine Caucus, has been a leader in supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression.

He signed a bipartisan letter to the Trump administration in early September asking that the money be released. And Portman quickly put out a news release praising the president when it was freed up on Sept. 11. That release did not mention Trump seeking a better deal; it referred to "the completion of a Department of Defense and State Department review of the program."

When the White House released the record of the call between Trump and Zelenskiy last week, Portman said: "The transcript is not surprising because it confirms what the president said previously about the call. There was no quid pro quo regarding the military aid to Ukraine, and he was focused on the need for the Europeans to do more to help Ukraine, something I agree with. He should not have brought up the Joe Biden issue, but there was no quid pro quo, and I think the Democrats' rush to impeachment is totally unwarranted."

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