

NEWSROOM

Transcript of Pelosi Weekly Press Conference Today

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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. Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here as we observe the district work period in their – the Holy Days.

As we gather here, our Members across the country are having communication with their constituents on two subjects, in particular, and one perhaps. The first is on our legislation H.R. 3, to lower the cost of prescription drugs now. We are very pleased that the response that Members are receiving as we've asked them to go out there to receive public comment on H.R. 3, and when they return, we will be ready to proceed, some in committee, others are just among Members to present the legislation.

H.R. 3 is important because, as I've said to you before, across the country, you can see grown men cry at meetings because of the cost of prescription drugs. It's almost impossible for them to be healthy and financially healthy with the rising cost of prescription drugs. In the last year's election, this was a very high priority. It continues to be.

So, when the President says that he can't do anything if he has the threat of impeachment or the consideration of impeachment, I hope he doesn't mean he doesn't want to work together to lower the cost of prescription drugs.

It would give the Secretary additional powers to negotiate for lower costs. It would end the disparity of cost between what consumers in America pay and what they pay in other countries. It would have a cap on out-of-pocket expenses for catastrophic Medicare [drug] expenses. It would also, in a negotiation, not only be for Medicare, but for all, and it would have an inflation rebate that reverses years of increases.

So, we're very pleased with the work that has gone into it so far by our three Chairmen: Frank Pallone of Energy & Commerce, Richie Neal of Ways & Means and Bobby Scott of Education & [Labor], and many Members as well. We will be discussing this again over the break and the district work period when we return.

At the same time, we are making progress on a U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement. This is an issue of concern around the country, and we want to be sure, as we go forward, we are protecting, we are strengthening America's working families and our farmers, who are very affected by this. This is not about trickle-down trade. We're not trickle-down economics people. We're not trickle-down trade people either. Unless it hits home for our workers and our farmers in terms of enforceability, we can't be there yet. But we are on a path to yes. And as probably know, on Friday, our House task force, under the leadership of Richie Neal in Ways & Means, put forth a counter-offer to what the Administration has proposed.

When we can arrive at a place where not only do we have our issues addressed, but that we have enforceability that will make it real for America's families and farmers, then we can go down that path. I hope, again, that the President saying because of other actions, in terms

of upholding the Constitution of the United States, that he is not – he can't, he can't work with us, because I do think he wants this U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement. And, we want it when it is right in terms of enforceability and that we can work together.

At the same time, we're hoping that if we can return, renew our conversations about infrastructure, building infrastructure of America. As I've said, our agenda last year when we ran, was For The People: lower the cost of health care by lowering the cost of prescription drugs – that's what we're doing – building infrastructure of America in a green way, so that we can increase paychecks. Lower health care, bigger paychecks, cleaner government. While I think that we can work with the Administration on prescription drugs – I hope so – and infrastructure – I hope so – clean government, that's more of a challenge.

So, as we gather here today, we are clearly at a place where we are legislating to try to meet the needs of the American people in a transformative way. We are investigating. We are litigating. We also are here today on the one year anniversary of the Khashoggi – since [Jamal] Khashoggi was killed. Such a very sad thing. And, at the same time, you see the administration schmoozing with the very people who perhaps orchestrated that.

The – again, it's yesterday, the Chinese observed their 70th anniversary. At the same time, the President was very positive about that. While observing their anniversary is one thing, praising them for it is another when they have serious repression going on right now in China, whether it's undermining the cultural language and religion of Tibet; whether it's the incarceration – placing in education camps one, two or three, depending on the cost, but at least one million Uyghurs; and whether it's the suppression of democracy in Hong Kong and just the violation of human rights throughout China.

It's the same fight we've been having for years. For what does it profit a man or a country if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul, but we seem to be able to ignore the shout out from our soul on respecting the dignity and worth of every person.

So, I know many of you are here, some of you are regulars, many of you are not, and I said to Mr. Schiff, maybe you should come to all of our meetings, we might get some coverage for what we're trying to do for the American people. But, we are very proud of the work of our Chairman of the Intelligence Committee.

We take this to be a very sad time for the American people, for our country. Impeaching a president or having the investigation to impeach a president is not anything to be joyful about. I don't know that anybody's joyful, but it is a sad time.

And, as you've heard me say over and over again, the dark days of the revolution, Thomas Paine said, 'The times have found us.' We think the times have found us now. Not that we place ourselves in the category of greatness of our Founders, but we do place ourselves in a time of urgency on the threat to the Constitution, a system of checks and balances, that is being made.

It is – they fought for our independence, they declared independence, they fought and won, they established a democracy. Thank God they made the Constitution amendable so we could always ever be expanding freedom, and we see the actions of this President being an assault on the Constitution. Once we had his even admission to that, we had no choice but to go forward.

It's hard. We want to weigh the equities. We want to be fair as we go forward, and we couldn't be better served than by the leadership of our Chairman of the Intelligence Committee, Adam Schiff, and it's my honor to present him to you now.

Speaker Pelosi. Just one moment, please. I'll decide who asks the questions. Do we have any questions first on the work to meet the needs of the American people in terms of the USMCA and the H.R. 3? On that subject?

Q: How do you envision working with this President on these key Democratic agenda items: lowering prescription drug costs, you know, ensuring tougher gun safety measures as you're actively considering whether to remove him from office?

Speaker Pelosi. But they have nothing to do with each other. We have a responsibility to uphold our oath of office, to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. We also have a responsibility to get the job done for the American people.

The President has said he wants this Mexico, U.S., – U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement to go forward and we are awaiting the language on enforceability, so does it mean that he doesn't, he can't do that? That's really up to him, and I do expect that he does want that, and that he does need that and that he's not going to blame it on us because we are honoring our oath of office. And then on – he says that he wants to lower the cost of prescription drugs. The American people want us to do that, so is the President saying, 'If you question my actions, I can't agree on any subject,' then the ball is in his court on that – on that.

But many of you have always been interested in USMCA, any ongoing interest there?

Yes, sir.

Q: On the USMCA, the President keeps saying that the USMCA will pay for his wall. How does money generated by the USMCA work its way into the general fund to be appropriated by Congress to pay for any wall?

Speaker Pelosi. It doesn't. It doesn't. It doesn't. Okay. No, I'm not calling on you, I'm calling on this young lady here. Thank you.

Q: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Lisa from PBS News. Thank you for having this news conference. A question for you and one for Chairman Schiff, do you – do you have plans or have you taken off the table the idea of a full House vote on impeachment –

Speaker Pelosi. Excuse me, dear. I'm first doing H.R. 3. Anyone on H.R. 3, does anybody in this room care about the cost of prescription drugs and what it means to America's working families? From time to time, you've asked those questions. Does anyone care about the USMCA? The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement?

Q: Is there a hard, fast date on when you need this to be resolved?

Speaker Pelosi. This being what?

Q: USMCA.

Speaker Pelosi. No. Well, we – I'd like – we're on a path to yes, as far as the trade agreement is concerned, and at some point, I'm just saying, it's either yes or no. We either have enforceability or we don't, but I'm hopeful that we will, and I'm hopeful that it will be soon.

Q: Is there any kind of deadline you've given the Administration or anything?

Speaker Pelosi. No. We have a good working relationship. Believe me, the quiet you hear is progress. Is progress. We go back and forth and over this break, the staffs are, between the two trade reps and our negotiators, are seeking clarification, and where there's room for cooperation, where we may have more challenges.

But it's going in a forward direction. So we're very pleased with that because, again, we're trying to find common ground with the President. He always wanted this. We do, too. And let's just find our common ground in that regard.

Q: Speaker Pelosi, another question on policy before we get to the other news of the day, which is impeachment. What about the quiet we hear on gun legislation? Two or three weeks ago the White House telegraphed we might hear when the President would support in some sort of gun package. We – even the press have heard nothing. Have you heard anything from the White House?

Speaker Pelosi. Well, the most recent communication I had from the White House on gun violence prevention was a call from the President last Tuesday. So, we can segue from one subject to the next here. He called early that morning to say that, how happy I would be to see the progress that he was making on coming to agreement on gun violence prevention. I was curious about what that progress could be, said he was working with Democrats and Republicans. I don't know of any – I reminded him that we had sent a bill over to the Senate, H.R. 8 and H.R. 1112, two pieces of legislation that will save the most lives, and I would hope that whatever he was talking about was very close to that.

Oh, yes, you're going to be very pleased. That's the last I've heard of that. At that point, that is when the President segued into the telephone call in which he admitted that this call took place and that what happened was 'perfect.' I didn't say – I said, 'Mr. President, it's not perfect, it's wrong, but your admission to what has now been in the public domain informs the timing of how we go forward.' So, again, that was the last I heard from them.

Let me just say on gun violence protection – prevention. We're not going away until we get legislation signed into law that protects our children. I said to the President on another occasion on the 200th day of the – Chuck Schumer and I called the President on that, that was a couple of Sundays ago – I think the 15th of September, two and a half weeks ago, that was the 200th day since we sent over H.R. 8. And I said to the President, 'I pray for you and the safety of you and your family. And I hope that God will – pray that God will give you illumination, an enlightenment to pray, to work for the safety of other families in our country.'

So again, the most recent – I'm not going to say the last, I hope it's not the last, but the most recent communication I've had from the White House was in the same call where the President admitted to what he said in that phone conversation, okay?

Q: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On impeachment?

Speaker Pelosi. Yes.

Q: Have you taken off the table, or do you plan for a full House vote on an impeachment inquiry? And Chairman Schiff, as the White House seems to be – in your words, you're worried about interference, delayed, in the past sometimes it's taken a long time, years, to compel documents and testimony from the White House. Are you preparing for a court battle, and how do you make sure that that happens in what you say is an expeditious manner?

Speaker Pelosi. First of all, there's no requirement that there be a Floor vote. That's not anything that is excluded and, by the way, there's some Republicans that are very nervous about our bringing that vote to the Floor.

Chairman Schiff. To say that we are concerned that the White House will attempt to stonewall our investigation, much as they have stonewalled other committees in the past, it's why I say the White House needs to understand that any action like that, that forces us to litigate or have to consider litigation, will be considered further evidence of obstruction of

justice. And, of course, that was an article of impeachment against Nixon, the obstruction of the lawful functions of Congress, that is. We will also draw the inference, though, as appropriate, that they are trying to conceal facts that would corroborate the allegations in the whistleblower complaint, so we'll have to decide whether to litigate or how to litigate.

We're not from around here, though. We don't want this to drag on months and months and months, which appears to be the Administration's strategy, so they just need to know that even as they try to undermine our ability to find the facts around the President's effort to coerce a foreign leader to create dirt that he can use against the political opponent, that they will be strengthening the case on obstruction if they behave that way.

Q: Speaker, thank you very much. I would like to ask Madam Speaker and also, Chairman, this as well, the President wants to interview the whistleblower. He says he has the right to meet his accuser. Your response, both of you, please.

Chairman Schiff. The whistleblower has the right in the statute to remain anonymous, and we will do everything in our power to make sure that that whistleblower's protected, that that whistleblower's preferences, in terms of their anonymity, are respected. And let's – let's not make any mistake here, the President wants to make this all about the whistleblower and suggest people that come forward with evidence of his wrongdoing are somehow treasonous, and should be treated as traitors and spies. This is a blatant effort to intimidate witnesses, it's an incitement to violence, and I would hope, and we are starting to see Members of both parties speaking out against attacking this whistleblower or others that have pertinent information.

So, the other thing I wanted to underscore, though, is, what the whistleblower has set out, that is within our power to this day to confirm, we see confirmed in that call record. The President can attack the whistleblower rhetorically all the President wants. It doesn't change the fact that the record of that call shows the President of the United States in a same conversation, indeed, immediately after the Ukraine President asked for more military help, the President of the United States asked that leader 'a favor though.' And no attack on the whistleblower or anyone else is going to change those underlying facts.

Speaker Pelosi. On the subject – excuse me – on the subject of the whistleblower, I said to the President on that call, you've come into my wheelhouse, 25 years on the Intelligence Committee as a Member, as Ranking Member, as Mr. Schiff was before he became the Chairman when we got the Majority. So I was part of the Gang of Four before I was even in the leadership as a Gang of Eight.

So, for 25 years, one way or another, I was there when we improved the whistleblower legislation in the late '90s. I was part of that. I was there when we made further improvements and President Obama made executive – I don't know if it's executive order, but executive action, improvements in the whistleblower legislation. And then we had further legislation. And then, I was there when we created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and what his responsibility was in terms of a whistleblower.

So, this is very – I hope that you understand, and I suspect that you do, the seriousness of the President of the United States saying he wants to interview that person. We will treat the President with fairness in the – as we go forward.

We will have investigations and questioning that are worthy of the Constitution of the United States. It's unworthy of the Constitution of the United States to do what he did in that call, and he admitted to me, said it's 'perfect.' No, it's not perfect. It's wrong, A; and, B, that protecting whistleblowers is a very, very important requirement that we have.

The Intelligence Community recognizes the importance of whistleblowers. Protecting whistleblowers who see wrongdoing of any kind in our government is essential. The President probably doesn't realize how dangerous his statements are when he says he wants to expose who the whistleblower is and those who may have given the whistleblower that information.

This is a very serious, very serious challenge that the President has put there. It's very sad. I don't see impeachment as a unifying thing for our country. I weighed those equities hard and long until I had the President's admission that he did what he did.

Q: One big picture question and one logistical question, just following up on what you just said. Some Republicans have said that the President's phone call wasn't great, but that it isn't an impeachable offense. Is it possible that you're making too much of one phone call?

Speaker Pelosi. Absolutely not. I want to yield to you.

Chairman Schiff. Well, if you think about what the framers were concerned about at the time of the drafting of the Constitution, they were paramountly concerned about foreign interference in American affairs. They wanted to ensure that the President of the United States was defending the interests and national security of the United States and not corruptly, secretly advancing some private agenda with a foreign power.

It's hard to imagine a set of circumstances that would've alarmed the Founders more than what's on that call, where you have a President using the full power of his office to try to effectively coerce a foreign leader that is completely dependent on our country for military, economic, diplomatic and other support, to intervene in our election to help his campaign. It's hard to imagine a more corrupt course of conduct.

So, to my Republican colleagues that say, 'There's nothing to see here,' or, 'Yeah, it's bad, but is it really something you'd remove the President from office for?' They're going to have to answer. If this conduct doesn't rise to the level of the concern the Founders have, what conduct does?

Now, we only know some of the facts at this point. The call record seems to be pretty undisputed. The suspension of military assistance is undisputed now. The sequestration of this call record and maybe others into a file in which they were never supposed to be placed, a file that is for classified information of the highest order, covert action, for example, those facts are not contested. But, all the facts around that we still need to flesh out: What was the State Department's role? What was the Secretary's role? What was the role of the Attorney General?

There's a great more that we need to know to understand the full depth of the President's misconduct. And, maybe when that comes out, it will persuade some of those Republicans to recognize the gravity of the situation. But, I think we have to be realistic here. There seems to be no floor below which this President can drop that some of the GOP Members, and maybe even many of the GOP Members, would not be willing to endorse, look away from, avoid comment on, let alone, rise to condemn as incompatible with the duties of his office.

Speaker Pelosi. Make no mistake, in that telephone call, the President undermined our national security because of his – what he had done a few days earlier. The President said, 'Well, I didn't say that in the call.' No. The sequencing of it. You have to look at the sequence. A few days before the President withdrew that. Now why? Why would that just come from the President? There was no, as far as we know, and we'll find out if there is, any

National Security Council justification for the President withdrawing assistance that had been passed by the Congress of the United States, in a bipartisan way, and then the President, just on his own, decided he was going to use it as leverage.

So, using that as leverage, we – we supported that military assistance in the interest of our national security. Undermining our national security, undermining his oath of office to protect and defend the Constitution because he was overthrowing an act of Congress just on his own, undermining the integrity of our elections. And that's what means something to people in their lives.

They have to know that their vote counts and that it will be counted as cast, and this President of the United States is stooping to a level that is beneath the dignity of the Constitution of the United States and our Founders. Since the Chairman mentioned our Founders, they put guardrails in the Constitution because they knew there might be someone who would overplay his or her power. They never thought that we would have a President who would kick those guardrails over and disregard the Constitution and say, proposition, 'Article II says that I can do whatever I feel like.'

So, this is sad. We have to be prayerful. We have to be worthy of the Constitution as we go forward. We have to be fair to the President and that's why this is an investigation: an inquiry, and not an outright impeachment, and we have to give the President his chance to exonerate himself. But, he thinks what he did was perfect. So, we have that situation, but I say to my colleagues, 'Calmness, quiet so that we can hear, that we can hear what is being said in this regard.'

Again, on that very day, September 17th, that was Constitution Day, a Tuesday. Two Tuesdays ago from yesterday. That was when that explosion hit of what possibly happened in that phone conversation, which the President confirmed to me in our call.

Q: Madam Speaker?

Speaker Pelosi. And that day was the day we observed the adoption of our Constitution, September 17th. On that day, way back when, when Benjamin Franklin left Independence Hall, people said to him 'What do we have, Dr. Franklin, a monarchy or a Republic?' He said 'A Republic, if we can keep it.'


It is our responsibility to keep that Republic with the genius of the separation of powers, three co-equal branches of government, each a check and balance on the others, separation of power, a Republic, if we can keep it. That's our responsibility, that's the oath of office that we take, and that is what is the basis – one of the reasons why we just have to look at the facts and the Constitution.

Any other objections people may have to the President have no place in this discussion, in terms of is he too cowardly to protect children from gun violence? Is he too cruel to protect Dreamers? Is he too in denial to understand climate change? The list goes on. Save that for the election.

This is about the facts relating to the Constitution and that is how we proceed with dignity, with respect, prayerfully and, again, worthy of the sacrifice of our Founders; the sacrifice of our men and women in uniform who fight for our freedom; and the aspirations of our children, so they'll live under future presidents who will honor the Constitution of the United States.

Thank you all very much.

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