

Why not call it a 'bribe'? Democrats have focus group-tested their impeachment strategy for maximum effect

by Becket Adams | November 15, 2019 02:40 PM

NBC News and Reuters were savaged by the anti-Trump #Resistance this week for warning that Democrats would miss their opportunity to move public opinion in support of removing President Trump from office if the impeachment hearings fail to capture the attention of the general electorate.

Not [only is this analysis correct](#), but NBC and Reuters are also not alone in recognizing that Democrats need to appeal to more than just obsessively engaged former Russia-gate activists. Democratic leaders themselves recognize this, too, which is why they are workshopping their talking points and buzzwords for maximum impact and reach.

Democrats have, for example, retired the term "quid pro quo" for the simpler term "bribery," claiming the latter more accurately conveys the nature of the case against Trump. But there is more to the story, according to the [Washington Post](#). Democrats shelved "quid pro quo" after private polling found "bribery" packed more of a punch with survey respondents.

"[T]he Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee conducted focus groups in key House battlegrounds in recent weeks, testing messages related to impeachment," the *Washington Post* reports. "Among the questions put to participants was whether 'quid pro quo,' 'extortion' or 'bribery' was a more compelling description of Trump's conduct."

It adds, "According to two people familiar with the results, which circulated among Democrats this week, the focus groups found 'bribery' to be most damning. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because the results have not been made public."

You may not have even noticed the disappearance of the more accurate "quid pro quo," which had been used previously in every Democrat's speech and in every newsroom from New York City to Los Angeles.

Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, who sits on the House Intelligence Committee, led the charge to retire "quid pro quo" in favor of "bribery," saying this weekend on NBC News that "it's probably best not to use Latin words" to explain Trump's behavior.

Later, on Thursday, he said “bribery” was a more useful term, claiming it more precisely conveys the president’s alleged actions.

“‘Abuse of power’ is not necessarily a concept that most Americans run around thinking about,” he said. “In this case, the abuse of power was some combination of bribery and extortion.”

Trading “quid pro quo” for “bribery” means describing Trump's actions less accurately — bribes, after all, involve financially valuable personal gifts given in exchange for official acts. But the word might yet assist Democrats in their overall effort to make impeachment matter to more people.