



# Senate GOP wants speedy Trump acquittal

BY JORDAIN CARNEY - 12/28/19 06:16 AM EST

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Senate Republicans are plotting a speedy acquittal of President Trump as they strategize ahead of the impeachment trial.

After weeks of public haggling from within the caucus, GOP senators are largely lining up behind a shorter proceeding with few, if any, witnesses, paving the way for them to hand Trump an early election-year victory.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said his goal is “to have as short a trial as possible.”

“I think there's a desire by senators, quite honestly, to get this chapter closed and moved forward,” Graham told reporters.

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) said that when it comes to a trial “shorter is better,” and that he thought his colleagues were coalescing behind that.

“I think shorter is better for lots of reasons,” Cramer said. “I think people are ready to move on.”

Republicans are also stressing though that they don't want to simply dismiss the articles against Trump. The House voted earlier this month to impeach Trump on two counts: one charging him with abuse of power in his dealings with Ukraine and the second with obstructing Congress during its investigation of those actions.

“I'm ready to get this thing and get it done,” said Sen. David Perdue (R-Ga.). “It's time for him to have his day in court. ... I don't want to a vote to

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dismiss. I want a vote to acquit. The president deserves to have due process.”

Graham, who previously advocated dismissing the articles, added that a “motion dismissed will not stand. ... I don't want a motion to dismiss. I want a vote on the articles themselves.”

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who has emerged as a close ally of Trump's, has floated trying to dismiss the article, including [telling The Washington Post](#) in November that he would make the motion “as soon as we possibly can.” A motion to dismiss would need 51 votes, and members of GOP leadership have suggested it would fall short.

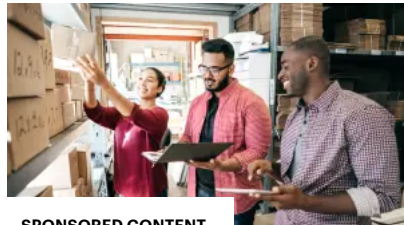
Asked after the House impeachment vote if he still wanted to dismiss the articles instead of going through a trial, Paul sidestepped, telling The Hill that the “whole idea of the impeachment inquiry was ill-conceived ... so I think the quicker it can be done the better.”

The embrace of a brief impeachment trial comes after the White House and top congressional allies initially called for a lengthy trial that would ground 2020 contenders in Washington into the early voting states and give Trump a public forum to probe former Vice President Joe Biden, Hunter Biden and Ukraine.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), who has left the door open to having witnesses, said if the White House is okay with skipping calling individuals to testify that he is ready to vote on the articles and move on.

“I'm ready to vote now,” Hawley said. “I think the articles are a joke.”

The change among GOP senators mirrors a similar shift in tone coming from the White House.



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White House spokesman Hogan Gidley told reporters earlier this month that the president “has made clear” that he wants witnesses including the Bidens and House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.).

But White House director of legislative affairs Eric Ueland told CBS News late last week that, similar to former special counsel Robert Muller's investigation into the 2016 election, “the facts belie the allegation and the facts speak very strongly for themselves.”

“The president is working closely and collaboratively with Leader McConnell,” Ueland added, asked if the president wants witnesses or not.

McConnell hasn't given an exact timeframe for how long he thinks a trial should take. While he's repeatedly stressed that the Senate GOP caucus writ large hasn't made a final decision on witnesses, he told Fox News Radio that he does not believe witnesses are necessary.

“Do we know enough? Have we learned enough after listening to all this to go on and vote on the two very weak articles of impeachment? Or do we want to have a show trial in which both sides try to embarrass the other and put on a, you know, an embarrassing scene, frankly, for the American people?,” McConnell said, characterizing the decision on witnesses.

“Obviously, I think we've heard enough. After we've heard the arguments, we ought to vote and move on,” he added.

The timeframe, and whether or not to call witnesses, isn't completely up to McConnell. The GOP leader, who likes to keep a tight grip on the floor, has said he doesn't have as much “ball control” during an impeachment trial.

Fifty-one senators will decide whether or not to call witnesses. During the Clinton impeachment trial senators voted along party lines to sign off on closed-door depositions with three individuals.

Democrats say they also want a quick trial, but one that would include testimony from witnesses and document requests. Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said his caucus's priority for the trial was that it was “fair and speedy.”

“I have proposed a very reasonable structure that would do just that,” he told reporters.

Schumer, in a letter sent earlier this month to McConnell, outlined a roughly two-week timeframe for the first phase of the trial, including 24 hours each for the House impeachment managers and Trump's team to submit their case, followed by 16 hours for senators to ask questions.

Republicans, while taking issue with Schumer's call for witnesses, have signaled they could support his outline for how the first part of a trial should go and how long it should last.

“I think we should take that on the first phase,” said Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), referring to the Democratic proposal. “That seemed pretty reasonable.”

Sen. Roy Blunt (Mo.), the No. 4 Senate Republican, said that Schumer's estimate for phase one “sounded about right.”

No Republican senators have signaled that they will support Schumer's witness request, which includes former national security adviser John Bolton and acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, nor his request that the Senate passes a resolution at the start of the trial that would cover both witnesses and procedure.

During the Clinton trial the Senate passed a resolution at the outset on the rules and then a second resolution after the proceeding started calling for three witnesses to testify behind closed doors.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), one of the senators Democrats are hoping to win over, told WGAN, a Maine radio station, that she thought the Clinton process was a “good model.”

In an attempt to get Democrats to back down on witnesses, some Republicans are warning that if Democrats push the issue they could try to call individuals that Democrats oppose asking to testify, including Hunter Biden.

“Well, if we go down in the witness path, we’re going to want the whistleblower. We’re going to want Hunter Biden. You can see here that this is the kind of mutual assured destruction episode that will go on for a long time,” McConnell told Fox News Radio.

Republicans believe they could have an advantage because the administration is expected to exert executive privilege to prevent Mulvaney or Bolton from testifying, setting up a lengthy court battle for Senate Democrats.

Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) made that point during a recent closed-door caucus lunch, telling his colleagues that while Democrats’ witnesses could be tied up in a months-long court battle the GOP witness wish list would not currently face the same fight, according to a Republican senator who attended the lunch.

Kennedy echoed his warning publicly during a Fox News interview pledging that if Democrats want a “full-blown trial,” by calling witnesses Republicans oppose, GOP senators would follow suit.

“If they want a trial,” he said, “my God, we are going to have a trial.”

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