

Trump Impeached for Inciting Insurrection

President Trump became the first president to be impeached twice, after the House approved a single charge citing his role in whipping up a mob that stormed the Capitol. He faces a Senate trial that could disqualify him from future office.



By Nicholas Fandos

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WASHINGTON — Donald J. Trump on Wednesday became the first American president to be impeached twice, as 10 members of his party joined with Democrats in the House to charge him with “incitement of insurrection” for his role in egging on a violent mob that stormed the Capitol last week.

Reconvening in a building now heavily militarized against threats from pro-Trump activists and adorned with bunting for the inauguration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr., lawmakers voted 232 to 197 to approve a single impeachment article. It accused Mr. Trump of “inciting violence against the government of the United States” in his quest to overturn the election results, and called for him to be removed and disqualified from ever holding public office again.

The vote left another indelible stain on Mr. Trump’s presidency just a week before he is slated to leave office and laid bare the cracks running through the Republican Party. More members of his party voted to charge the president than in any other impeachment.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, declaring the past week one of the darkest chapters in American history, implored colleagues to embrace “a constitutional remedy that will ensure that the republic will be safe from this man who is so

resolutely determined to tear down the things that we hold dear and that hold us together.”

A little more than a year after she led a painstaking, three-month process to impeach Mr. Trump the first time for a pressure campaign on Ukraine to incriminate Mr. Biden — a case rejected by the president’s unfailingly loyal Republican supporters — Ms. Pelosi had moved this time with little fanfare to do the same job in only seven days.

“He must go. He is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love,” the speaker said, adding later, “It gives me no pleasure to say this — it breaks my heart.”

The top House Republican, Representative Kevin McCarthy of California, conceded in a pained speech on the floor that Mr. Trump had been to blame for the deadly assault at the Capitol. It had forced the vice president and lawmakers who had gathered there to formalize Mr. Biden’s victory to flee for their lives.

“The president bears responsibility for Wednesday’s attack on Congress by mob rioters,” said Mr. McCarthy, one of the 138 Republicans who returned to the House floor after the mayhem and voted to reject certified electoral votes for Mr. Biden. “He should have immediately denounced the mob when he saw what was unfolding.”

Outside the House chamber, a surreal tableau offered reminders of the rampage that gave rise to the impeachment, as thousands of armed members of the National Guard in camouflage fatigues surrounded the complex and snaked through its halls, stacking their helmets, backpacks and weapons wherever they went. Their presence gave the proceedings a wartime feel, and evoked images of the 1860s, when the Union Army had quartered in the building.

A week of trauma and deliberation left lawmakers sparring not just over impeachment, but also over facial coverings mandated because of the coronavirus and newly installed metal detectors outside the House chamber meant to stop lawmakers from bringing guns onto the floor. Some Republicans darted past the

machines without stopping, setting the alarms wailing. Several Democrats said they had concerns — so far unsubstantiated — that far-right colleagues might have played a role in facilitating the attack, and they requested an investigation.

Dozens of others stayed away from the Capitol on the momentous day, fearful of exposing colleagues or themselves to the virus and of lingering security threats, instead casting their votes remotely by proxy.

The House's action set the stage for the second Senate trial of the president in a year. The precise timing of that proceeding remained in doubt, though, as senators appeared unlikely to convene to sit in judgment before Jan. 20, when Mr. Biden will take the oath of office and Mr. Trump will become a former president.

The last proceeding was a partisan affair. But this time, Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, was said to support the effort as a means of purging his party of Mr. Trump, setting up a political and constitutional showdown that could shape the course of American politics.

If a Senate trial resulted in Mr. Trump's conviction, it held out the prospect, tantalizing for Democrats and many Republicans alike, of barring him from ever holding office again.

In a measured statement after the vote, Mr. Biden called for the nation to come together after an "unprecedented assault on our democracy." He was staring down the likelihood that the trial would complicate his first days in office, and said he hoped Senate leadership would "find a way to deal with their constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation." That work included cabinet nominations and confronting the coronavirus crisis.

In the House, Democrats and Republicans who supported his ouster made no attempt to hide their fury at Mr. Trump, who was said to have enjoyed watching the attack play out on television as lawmakers pleaded for help. Republicans harangued members of their own party for supporting his mendacious campaign to claim election victory.

Returning to the same chamber where many of them donned gas masks and hid under chairs amid gunfire one week ago — as rioters carrying zip ties and chanting “hang Pence” and “where’s Nancy” overtook the police — lawmakers issued stinging indictments of the president and his party.

“They may have been hunting for Pence and Pelosi to stage their coup,” said Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the lead impeachment prosecutor, “but every one of us in this room right now could have died.”



President Trump encouraged a mob of his supporters to attack the Capitol one week ago. Doug Mills/The New York Times

At least five people did die during the attack, including an officer and a member of the mob who was shot just outside the chamber door.

Lawmakers said the threat from Mr. Trump had not subsided.

“He is capable of starting a civil war,” said Representative Maxine Waters of California, a veteran liberal.

After four years of nearly unquestioning alliance with him, few Republicans defended Mr. Trump’s actions outright. Those who did resorted to a familiar set of false equivalencies, pointing to racial justice protests last summer that turned violent and accusations that Democrats had mistreated the president and were trying to stifle the 74 million Americans who voted for him.

“It’s always been about getting the president, no matter what,” Representative Jim Jordan, Republican of Ohio, shot across the room at Democrats. “It’s an obsession — an obsession that has now broadened. It’s not just about impeachment anymore, it’s about canceling, as I’ve said. Canceling the president and anyone that disagrees with them.”

Overhanging the proceedings was the deadly coronavirus pandemic, which is killing more than 3,000 Americans a day. A handful of lawmakers were infected after the chaotic evacuation of the Capitol, as many Republicans had refused to wear masks in the secure rooms where lawmakers in both parties had huddled for safety.

Far from contrite, Mr. Trump insisted in the run-up to the vote that his words to loyalists swarming Washington last week had been appropriate. In the days since, he has repeated bogus lies that the election was stolen from him. He also denounced impeachment as part of the yearslong “witch hunt” against him, but had taken no apparent steps to put together a legal team to defend him when he stands trial.

Not long after the vote on Wednesday, Mr. Trump released a video condemning the violence and urging his followers to avoid a repeat in “the coming days both here in Washington and across the country” as federal authorities warned of a nationwide wave of violence surrounding Mr. Biden’s inauguration. But the president did not mention his own role in instigating the violence or apologize, nor did he concede or mention Mr. Biden’s name.

Mr. Trump recorded the video under pressure from aides, who have warned him that he faces potential legal exposure for the riot, which took place after a speech in which he urged supporters to “fight” the election results.



National Guard troops walking through the Capitol Rotunda on Wednesday before the House debated the charge against Mr. Trump. T.J. Kirkpatrick for The New York Times

It also came after Mr. McConnell had released a note to Republican senators in which he did not deny that he backed the impeachment push. The leader said that he had “not made a final decision on how I will vote, and I intend to listen to the legal arguments when they are presented to the Senate.”

Mr. McConnell also issued a separate statement in which he rejected a plea by Democrats to begin the proceeding immediately. After the House vote, he said there was “simply no chance that a fair or serious trial could conclude” before the

inauguration.

“I believe it will best serve our nation if Congress and the executive branch spend the next seven days completely focused on facilitating a safe inauguration and an orderly transfer of power to the incoming Biden administration,” Mr. McConnell said.

The statement did not mention the merits of the case, but privately, the Senate Republican leader was seething at Mr. Trump — whom he has sworn he will not speak to again — and is said to believe the president committed impeachable offenses. It would most likely take 17 Republicans joining Democrats to convict Mr. Trump, an exceedingly high bar.

Mr. McConnell’s anger was shared by some Republicans in the House, most prominently Representative Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the chairwoman of the House Republican Conference and scion of a storied political family.

The other Republicans who voted to impeach Mr. Trump were Representatives Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington, John Katko of New York, Adam Kinzinger of Illinois, Fred Upton of Michigan, Dan Newhouse of Washington, Peter Meijer of Michigan, Anthony Gonzalez of Ohio, David Valadao of California and Tom Rice of South Carolina. Together, they issued some of the sharpest condemnations of the president, defying the prevailing view of their party.

“I’m not afraid of losing my job, but I am afraid that my country will fail,” Ms. Herrera Beutler said. “I’m afraid patriots to this country have died in vain. I’m afraid my children won’t grow up in a free country. I’m afraid injustice will prevail.”

Mr. Rice, who represents a safely Republican seat, said that he had “backed this president through thick and thin for four years.”

He added: “I campaigned for him and voted for him twice. But this utter failure is inexcusable.”



Representatives Jaime Herrera Beutler of Washington and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois were two of the 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Mr. Trump. Anna MoneyMaker for The New York Times

A dozen or so other Republicans indicated they might have supported impeachment if Mr. Trump were not on the brink of leaving office or if Democrats had slowed the process down.

Mr. McCarthy, who had privately mused about calling on Mr. Trump to resign after years of eagerly defending him, spoke out against a “snap impeachment,” warning that it would “further fan the flames of partisan division.” But he also batted down false suggestions from some of his colleagues that Antifa had actually been responsible for the siege, not supporters of Mr. Trump.

Mr. McCarthy proposed censuring the president instead of impeaching him.

But there were strong signs of support for Mr. Trump as well, despite the fact that he has lost his party the House, the Senate and the White House in the course of two years. Far-right Republicans immediately started a campaign to oust Ms. Cheney from her leadership post, which she said she would not relinquish.

While Ms. Cheney had released a statement on Tuesday announcing her intention to impeach Mr. Trump and denouncing him in scathing terms, she chose not to speak during the impeachment debate on Wednesday. Democrat after Democrat quoted her anyway — despite the party’s longstanding antipathy for Ms. Cheney and her father, Dick Cheney, the former vice president — effectively arguing that her backing signified a broad consensus that the president must go.

“As Liz Cheney was saying, there has never been a greater betrayal by a president of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution. Don’t dismiss that,” said Representative Steny H. Hoyer, Democrat of Maryland and the majority leader. “As she has taken a stand, I hope others will as well.”

The vote came a little more than a year after the House impeached Mr. Trump for trying to use the levers of power to pressure the leader of Ukraine into smearing Mr. Biden, then his leading rival for the looming 2020 election. Republicans unanimously opposed the charges then, but the themes at the center of the impeachment and subsequent trial were ultimately the same on Wednesday: Mr. Trump’s willingness to put himself above the nation he swore an oath to lead and abuse his power in pursuit of retaining it.



Ms. Pelosi and the newly appointed House impeachment managers applauded Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland before the vote on Wednesday. Erin Schaff/The New York Times

The House’s case was narrow, laid out in a four-page impeachment article that charged the president “threatened the integrity of the democratic system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power, and imperiled a coequal branch of government.”

Specifically, it said he sowed false claims about election fraud, pressured Georgia election officials to “find” him enough votes to overturn the results and then encouraged a crowd of his most loyal supporters to gather in Washington and confront Congress.

The article referred to the 14th Amendment, passed after the Civil War, which prohibits any officeholder involved in “insurrection or rebellion” from holding official office. It also quoted Mr. Trump’s own words at the rally a week ago, when

he told supporters, “If you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”

This time, there were no witness interviews, no hearings, no committee debates and no real additional fact finding beyond the public record and the plain facts of the brutal attack and Mr. Trump’s words.

Emily Cochrane and Luke Broadwater contributed reporting from Washington, and Maggie Haberman from New York.

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