



‘I’m not for impeachment’ without bipartisan support, Pelosi says, roiling fellow Democrats

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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in an interview that she opposes moving to impeach President Trump, even though she believes he is unfit for office — her most definitive statement on ousting the president and one that stands to alienate some members of the Democratic Party.

“I’m not for impeachment,” she said in a [March 6 interview](#) conducted for a future issue of The Washington Post Magazine.

“This is news,” added Pelosi (D-Calif.). “I haven’t said this to any press person before. But since you asked, and I’ve been thinking about this, impeachment is so divisive to the country that unless there’s something so compelling and overwhelming and bipartisan, I don’t think we should go down that path because it divides the country. And he’s just not worth it.”

Pelosi's remarks drew swift rebukes from some liberals who have been clamoring to begin impeachment proceedings over controversies ensnaring the Trump administration, with several House committees launching investigations.

Other Democrats on investigative committees were surprised that the speaker would all but rule out impeachment just as they were starting their investigations.

"I don't think it's something we decide whether or not its 'worth it,'" said House Progressive Caucus co-chair Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.). "If [our investigations show] a consistent pattern of abuse of power, of obstruction of justice . . . then that to me seems like it will be impeachable."

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Moderate Democrats, however, welcomed what they considered a politically pragmatic response, especially with no bipartisan support for impeachment and Republicans controlling the Senate, which would have to convict Trump to remove him from office.

Democrats also recognize that moving toward impeachment would energize core GOP voters ahead of the 2020 presidential and congressional elections. Pelosi's comments come as Republicans are seeking to portray Democrats as radicals beholden to the far left, unwilling to respect democratic norms.

In the interview, Pelosi said she does not believe that Trump is up to the job of running the country. Asked whether he was fit to be president, she countered: “Are we talking ethically? Intellectually? Politically? What are we talking here?” When a reporter said all, she said he was not.

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“All of the above. No. No. I don’t think he is,” she said. “I mean, ethically unfit. Intellectually unfit. Curiosity-wise unfit. No, I don’t think he’s fit to be president of the United States.”

But Pelosi suggested that her opinion on whether he is worthy of his office may not matter if the public — and at least some Republicans — don’t support impeachment.

Most House Democrats agree that they should give the chairmen of investigative committees the space to conduct their probes before engaging in serious impeachment discussions. But Pelosi’s suggestion that she doesn’t support movement toward impeachment because Trump is “just not worth it” won’t sit well with some in her caucus, while infuriating some on the left.

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In an interview with The Washington Post on Monday, pro-impeachment billionaire Tom Steyer said Pelosi “correctly analyzed the problem” in concluding that Trump is unfit to be president. “But,” he continued, “she’s not willing to do what’s necessary to solve it for political reasons, and that seems to me to be the essence of what’s wrong in Washington, D.C.”

Steyer, who did not take a direct shot at Pelosi personally, added, “It is the Congress’s job to hold the president accountable and to uphold the Constitution of the United States.”

Pelosi’s comments are likely to provide cover to House Democrats from more moderate districts, especially those who beat Republicans in 2018 by campaigning on reforming health care, preserving Social Security and Medicare, and cleaning up Washington. While liberal firebrands have won an outsize share of media coverage, the House Democratic majority was captured largely because of freshmen who ran to the center, said Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-Ill.), chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee — and many of them are uncomfortable with impeachment talk.

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“We’ve got 31 Democrats who serve in districts that Donald Trump won, and I’m one of them,” Bustos said. “When I go home, I don’t have people asking me about impeaching him. That is just not something that I hear. They consistently ask about health care and rebuilding our country and figuring out how to work together.”

Pelosi “wants to get the work done,” she added. “She says we have to focus on results, and I have a great appreciation for her saying that, because that works in any congressional district in America.”

But even some more traditional Democrats disagree. Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-Va.), a member of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, said Pelosi’s comments were probably “designed to remind people that loose talk about impeachment is not helpful, that it distracts from our agenda and even from the intrinsic value of the oversight hearings.” But while he agreed, he said, she may have gone too far.

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“I felt that her statement didn’t leave much wiggle room, and on that part, I respectfully demur,” Connolly said. “I took an oath to the Constitution, not to the Democratic Party. . . . If I feel that I have a constitutional obligation to follow that procedure, then I have a legal and moral obligation to do so, even if no Republican wants to do anything.”

On the GOP side, House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy (Calif.) said Pelosi’s remarks were “a smart thing for her to say. I mean, there’s nothing to impeach.”

But many Republicans viewed her comments through a political lens, saying Pelosi was merely trying to protect her caucus’s moderate members.

“I think they have to put up a front saying they’re not going there, but everything behind the scenes says differently,” said the House Judiciary Committee’s ranking Republican, Doug Collins (Ga.). “I think they have a part of their conference they can’t say no to.”

Pelosi’s comments came days after the House Judiciary Committee, the panel with jurisdiction over impeachment proceedings, issued document requests to more than 80 people and entities affiliated with Trump’s administration, campaign and businesses. Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), the chairman of the committee, called the requests the first step in a larger probe into possible obstruction of justice and abuses of power by the president.

Meanwhile, other House committees are beginning to investigate payments that Trump’s then-lawyer Michael Cohen made during the 2016 campaign to silence women who alleged affairs with Trump, as well as Trump’s plans to build a tower in Moscow and how he managed his private company.

For months, Pelosi has treated the possibility of Trump's impeachment delicately, publicly noting the need for bipartisan support and significant evidence of wrongdoing before pursuing the president's removal.

"If and when the time comes for impeachment, it will have to be something that has such a crescendo in a bipartisan way," she said, for instance, in a CBS News interview in early January.

She echoed that bipartisan requirement in the Post interview.

However, given congressional Republicans' unwillingness to push back on their leader in the Oval Office over the past two years, some Democrats disagree with Pelosi's assessment that any impeachment proceedings must have support from the GOP. House Democrats, they argue, have a job to do in holding the president accountable — regardless of the GOP's stance.

Steyer, for instance, noted that Republicans don't believe in climate change. Should the party turn a blind eye to that serious matter, too? he asked.

"If we're not allowed to tell the truth until the Republicans give us a signature that says it's okay, then we're not going to tell the truth about a lot of things," he said.

Pelosi has, at times, referenced the failed 1998 impeachment of President Bill Clinton by congressional Republicans as a formative experience in her thinking — an argument she renewed in the interview.

"There's no question that that was horrible for the country. It was unnecessary and the rest," she said. "But in terms of where we are, as Thomas Paine said, the times have found us. And the times have found us now. We have a very serious challenge to the Constitution of the United States in the president's unconstitutional assault on the Constitution, on the first branch of government, the legislative branch. . . . This is very serious for our country."

Meanwhile, members of Pelosi's caucus have been outspoken about their desire to impeach Trump. This month, Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) marched on Capitol Hill with impeachment supporters, and Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) has discussed impeaching the president in numerous interviews.

Two House Democrats, Reps. Al Green (Tex.) and Brad Sherman (Calif.), have already drafted articles of impeachment. Green moved in December 2017 to force the House to consider impeachment articles; the effort was killed on a 364-to-58 vote.

And outside the Capitol, Steyer has pledged to spend tens of millions of dollars on an effort to impeach Trump, forming a group called Need to Impeach that has taken out television ads and constructed a grass-roots network to push the issue. Steyer has also vowed to target the chairmen of House panels investigating the president to ensure that they do their jobs, as his organization has said.

“He’s brought us to the brink of nuclear war,” Steyer said in one nationally televised ad. “Obstructed justice at the FBI. And in direct violation of the Constitution, he’s taken money from foreign governments and threatened to shut down news organizations that report the truth. If that isn’t a case for impeaching and removing a dangerous president, then what has our government become?”

Sherman said Monday that he understood Pelosi’s position, and he declined to criticize her remarks but said that there were “very intense, very impatient people” in the Democratic caucus who might.

“It is clear to me the things Trump did that are felonious in the first months of his presidency are not politically sufficient to remove him from office,” he said, adding, “I will not be attacking the speaker for a decision not to officially begin the impeachment process at a time when there is no bipartisan support for it.”

But Sherman defended his decision to introduce articles of impeachment, as well as others who have raised the issue: “Imagine what Trump would have done over the last two years if he thought he was immune. . . . Think of the hundreds of things that have crossed his mind that he hasn’t done.”

