

Bill Kaplan: Checks and balances, not impeachment

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Special Counsel Robert Mueller, a Republican, was appointed by GOP Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, possible collusion by the Trump campaign and White House obstruction of justice. To date, workmanlike Mueller has indicted 19 individuals, including fired Trump National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, Trump campaign Chair Paul Manafort and Deputy Chair Rick Gates. Flynn and Gates pled guilty and are cooperating. 13 Russians are among the indicted, facing charges for interfering in the election.

While Mueller and his crackerjack team try to get to the bottom, Trump continues to tweet bluster, lies and worse. Trump tweeted: "At some point I will have no choice but to use the powers granted to the Presidency and get involved!". The New York Times reported that Trump has twice demanded that Mueller be fired. And, the Washington Post reported that a Trump lawyer raised the possibility of presidential pardons for Flynn and Manafort with their attorneys. All reminiscent of Nixon who said: "Well, when the President does it, that means that it is not illegal."

Meanwhile, GOP House Speaker Paul Ryan, oblivious to his constitutional oversight responsibilities and legislative record, warned of a Democratic-led Congress. Ryan said: "You'll have subpoenas, you'll have ... the system shutting down." However, Washington Post conservative blogger Jennifer Rubin said: "Ryan has it backwards. The 'system' - of constitutional government and checks and balances - is currently shut down thanks to Republicans ...".

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Ryan also warned that a Democratic win in November would lead to “absolute gridlock”. But the GOP-led Congress’s single accomplishment exploded the deficit, with tax cuts benefitting corporations and the rich. Thankfully, Democrats and a few Republicans defeated repeal of the Affordable Care Act. That is the sorry GOP record. No infrastructure program, nothing for underfunded multiemployer pension plans and threats to cut Medicare, Social Security and safety net programs. What to do?

Only a Democratic-led Congress will stand up for regular folks, as well as provide checks and balances. Impeachment is not on the table. Not a single congressional Republican supports impeachment. A majority in the GOP-led House would be needed to pass an article of impeachment. And, two-thirds of the GOP-led Senate would be necessary for conviction. There are other considerations.

Only 8 federal officials have ever been impeached and convicted. Impeachment of a president must be bipartisan. California Democratic Representative Adam Schiff, a former federal prosecutor and ranking minority member of the House Intelligence Committee, said: “Should the facts warrant impeachment (of Trump), that case will be made more difficult politically if part of the country feels that removing Mr. Trump was the result that some of their fellow Americans were wishing for all along.” Accordingly, let Mueller finish his job. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin said: firing Mueller “would be crossing a red line ...”. Finally, we must all work like heck for a Democratic-led Congress. Charlie Cook, nonpartisan Cook Political Report, astutely said: “Could it be voters are seeking moderation, checks and balances?”

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington D.C. for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 - 2009.