

# Bill Kaplan: Impeachment, facts matter

Posted on Monday, Nov 25, 2019

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I have been reluctant to support impeachment of Trump. Only 8 federal officials have ever been impeached by the House (majority of those voting) and convicted (removed) by the Senate (two-thirds of those present). Presidents Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton were impeached, but not convicted. And, Nixon resigned after the House Judiciary Committee approved 3 bipartisan impeachment articles. Today, a Senate conviction would require 20 Republicans to join all Democrats (if every senator attended). Unimaginable!

However, facts matter in a democratic society. Authoritarian rule requires constant deception, as well as undermining Congress, courts, intelligence agencies, law enforcement and the press. Disregarding facts will weaken America and send the nation into a speedy decline. The House impeachment inquiry has uncovered damning and inconvenient facts. Ignore at our own peril.

Public hearings, over two weeks by the House Intelligence Committee, made clear that Trump lied and subverted the Constitution. Trump's infamous telephone call (partial) transcript with Ukrainian President Zelensky reinforced the whistleblower's complaint. Any wonder why Trump called the whistleblower a "spy" and treasonous. Worse, Trump hinted that the death penalty should be imposed. And, for good measure Trump called the press "scum" (Los Angeles Times). Trump even "mulled" firing the intelligence community's inspector general (a Trump appointee) for having told Congress about the whistleblower's complaint regarding Trump's telephone call (New York Times — NYT).

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However, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson has attacked the whistleblower: “This would have been far better off if we would’ve just taken care of this behind the scenes. ... (the whistleblower) exposed things that didn’t need to be exposed” (Meet the Press). What was exposed and confirmed by Trump’s telephone call (partial) transcript and congressional witnesses: Trump demanded that Ukraine dig up dirt on Joe Biden, a potential 2020 opponent, and endorse the fiction that it was Ukraine that interfered in our 2016 election.

“Johnson in the past has been an outspoken advocate of protections for whistleblowers... .” (NYT). But Johnson now says: “Not all whistleblowers are created equal”. Johnson believes that there’s Ukrainian dirt on Joe Biden and that Ukraine – not Russia – hijacked our 2016 election. This nonsense has been unequivocally disproved. Kurt Volker, former Trump special envoy to Ukraine and a GOP witness said: allegations against Biden were “not credible” and a Ukrainian investigation of Biden was “unacceptable”. And, Fiona Hill, former Trump-appointed National Security Council official, said: “I refuse to be part of an effort to legitimize an alternate narrative that the Ukrainian government is a U.S. adversary, and that Ukraine – not Russia – attacked us in 2016. These fictions are harmful ... .”

After the hearings ended, the NYT reported: “In a briefing that closely aligned with ... Hill’s testimony, American intelligence officials informed senators and their aides in recent weeks that Russia has engaged in a yearslong campaign to essentially frame Ukraine as responsible for Moscow’s own hacking of the 2016 election ... .” Did Johnson or his staff attend? What else does Johnson know about this scandal?

Facts matter. A democratic society can’t survive without facts.

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