



Explaining the Terms: Impeachment

Here is a brief explanation of the specific concepts and terms you will find throughout news reports and other resources on this topic.

Impeachment

The word "impeachment" can be thought of having a meaning similar to "indictment" - it is an official accusation against someone who holds elected or appointed government office. The term has come to mean the entire process designated in the Constitution, Article 1.

The House of Representatives has the power of impeachment, which means it can investigate and then formally accuse (or indict) a government official for wrongdoing. The House needs only a simple majority vote to make the formal accusation, or to "impeach" an official. The next step is that the person faces a trial in the Senate. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presides, and all 100 senators serve as jurors. The accused official may defend themselves and agents of the House of Representatives serve as the "prosecutors" trying to prove their case. The Senate then decides the sentence - either the person is removed from office or not. To remove the person, there must be a 2/3 majority for the vote by the Senate.

Impeachment is a political remedy. That means it is a way that the Legislative Branch holds accountable the other two branches of government. It is not a legal remedy. That means that if an official is impeached (whether or not they are ultimately removed) because of a crime committed in office, that person can still be tried in a court of law. Tradition holds that a sitting president cannot be indicted for a crime while in office, but if that president were to be impeached, they could be indicted after leaving office or if they are removed by the Senate.

Campaign Finance Law & Foreign Contributions.

The United States has laws that guide how federal political campaigns can accept donations or support so that people who run for office cannot be corrupted or influenced by donors or contributors. Part of that law pertains to help from outside the United States. Federal law prohibits a citizen of another country from directly or indirectly making a "contribution or donation of money or other thing of value" in any United States election. It also prohibits the person running for office or anyone on the campaign to solicit (ask for) or receive such a contribution.

Quid Pro Quo

This a Latin Phrase that means "something for something." The idea is to trade favors. Many people disagree about the level of quid pro quo that politicians should be allowed to engage in before the trading of favors is considered corruption. Quid Pro Quo is not required to determine whether an illegal foreign contribution has been made to a political

Whistleblower

A whistleblower is a person who reports mismanagement, waste, fraud, or other abuse in their organization. Most organizations have a policy in place so that whistleblowers can report their concerns anonymously so they don't face retaliation from their bosses or co-workers.

Whistleblower Protection Act

Congress enacted this law in 1989 to protect any whistleblower from being prosecuted criminally or being retaliated against within their organization (such as being fired or demoted) for reporting a wrongdoing. This applies to private and federal workers. In 1998, Congress added a process for federal employees in the Intelligence Community to use when they need to make a whistleblower report. Their cases are special because they could involve classified information.

Ukraine

Ukraine is a country southwest of Russia that used to be one of the republics controlled by the Soviet Union. Ukraine has a long, independent history prior to the USSR, and has been trying to establish its democracy since the 1990s. Ukraine is home to many natural resources and in the last decade, Russia has attempted to take over parts of Ukraine's territory. In 2014, Ukraine had a vast people's revolutionary movement to get rid of the remainder of Russian leadership and create an independent democracy. In response, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, a peninsula in southern Ukraine. Because of this action, Russia was condemned by the United Nations and was kicked out of the "G8" - an organization of the most economically powerful nations in the world.

Following the annexation of Crimea, Russian forces also invaded the eastern border of Ukraine in 2014. Ukrainian troops have been fighting Russian troops in eastern Ukraine ever since. NATO (the North American Treaty Organization), a military union of European and North American countries, has been supporting Ukraine against Russian military actions. While Ukraine is fighting to hold its territory against Russian invasion, it has gone through several democratic elections where the population has elected democratic reformers.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky was elected in May 2019. He is known as "the Jon Stewart" of Ukraine as he became very popular as a political satirist. He was elected on a platform of continuing to get rid of corruption in the government and win against Russia's invasion. The United States' foreign policy over the last decade has been to support Ukraine against Russia.

Connection to current events:

President Zelensky has been caught in the middle of the American impeachment inquiry because the underlying law that President Trump is accused of breaking was to solicit aid from President Zelensky in the form of asking him to help investigate one of President Trump's political rivals in the 2020 Election: former Vice President Joe Biden. President Zelensky and his country badly need monetary and military aid from the United States, and that aid was held up by President Trump while seeking this cooperation from Zelensky.

