

# **Impeachment Survival Guide**

## ***How to Retain Your Sanity and Get Along With Others During a Time of Political Crisis***

**by Philip St. Romain, M.S., D. Min.©**

On September 24, 2019, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, announced the beginning of a formal impeachment process to determine if the House should recommend to the U.S. Senate that President Donald J. Trump be tried and removed from his office as President. This is an historic event, having occurred only two other times in the history of the United States: when President Andrew Johnson was impeached in 1868, and William J. Clinton in 1998. In both situations, the House voted to approve the Articles of Impeachment, and the cases were sent to the U.S. Senate for trial, where an acquittal verdict was reached.

The purpose of this work is to briefly clarify the meaning of impeachment, and, moreso, to recommend practices for citizens to get along with each other during what is sure to be a very divisive process.

### **What is Impeachment?**

Impeachment is the term given to a formal process of inquiry by the U.S. House of Representatives to determine if there is sufficient reason to remove a federal official (in this case, President Trump) from office. Reasons for doing so are usually described as “high crimes and misdemeanors,” which can carry criminal status, or signify a betrayal of the President’s oath of office. There are usually hearings by various House committees, and at some point, the House Judiciary Committee decides whether or not to recommend Articles of Impeachment to the full House for discussion and vote. If a simple majority of House members approves the Articles, the President is impeached. The next step is to send the case to the U.S. Senate, where a formal trial is held to determine if the President should remain in office or be removed. It is presided over by the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. A 2/3 vote by the Senate removes the President from office and the Vice President become the new President; anything less than a 2/3 vote will result in acquittal.

A common misconception is that impeachment by the House is what removes a President from office, but from the explanation above, we see that it is only a recommendation for a formal trial — much like an indictment in other criminal proceedings. The investigations and discussions leading up to an impeachment can inform the Senate proceedings, but other issues can be introduced as well.

## **A Divisive Process**

The impeachment process is inherently divisive; *there are winners and losers*. Such proceedings don't usually begin unless there have already been controversial incidents gathering steam for some time, with different political groups at odds concerning their significance. As tempting as it might be to just tune out all the noise, it's important for citizens to understand the issues and to give feedback to congress. There is much at stake, here. Even if the President is not removed from office, the topics debated are sure to generate strong feelings on both sides.

Many Democrats are still sore from the 1998 impeachment of President Clinton, and Republicans have not forgotten those members of their Party in the Senate who voted to acquit him. Even if impeachment fails, there will be much “dirty laundry” aired out in public, and it will be difficult to forget what was said — not only by politicians, but by friends and family as well. If we are not careful about how we share our own thoughts and feelings, we can damage meaningful relationships in ways that are difficult to heal. The remainder of this work will review strategies to help us preserve important relationships during this politically stressful time.

## **Be Informed**

Whether you decide to engage in political discussions or not, it's important to be properly informed about the issues. This entails, first and foremost, an accurate grasp of the facts. For example, the question of why the Democrats in the House have begun this process can be answered in many ways:

- A. They don't like the President.
- B. They still haven't accepted the results of the 2016 election.
- C. They think the President's phone call to the Ukrainian President in July 2019 might have included inappropriate and maybe unlawful requests for Ukraine to investigate the activities of political rival Joe Biden and his son in Ukraine.

All three statements might have some truth to them, but only C is the reason given by Democrats for launching the impeachment process. Judgments about motives might be relevant, but it's almost impossible to prove them as factual. A fact can usually be corroborated and/or verified objectively. In this case, the phone call in question did take place, its contents can be verified, and this is the material that triggered the impeachment process and is a core concern of the investigation.

It's equally important to understand the President's perspective. He doesn't deny that the phone call took place, nor that he requested that the Ukrainian President investigate possible corruption by the Biden family, so he agrees with the Democrats on those points. He does not agree that his request was inappropriate or unlawful, however. The scope of the accusations might broaden, but that is where things stand at this writing.

Beyond the bare facts, there are other important considerations, of course. For example, the President is alleging that the Bidens' involvement in Ukraine entailed considerable corruption. If true, then that would certainly add merit to his request that the Bidens be investigated. If not, then he was either mistaken, or he is trying to deflect the discussion away from himself, or some other reason. The only way to know which is the truth would be to obtain factual information concerning the Bidens' activities in Ukraine. Obviously, it's impossible for ordinary citizens to do this, so you will need to do some research, read reports on the topic, and make up your mind. Fact-checking web sites like [snopes.com](http://snopes.com), [politifact.com](http://politifact.com), and [factcheck.org](http://factcheck.org) are good places to go to help sort things out.

The Internet and cable TV also present a wide spectrum of analyses of the news, which is a mixed blessing. A tendency by many is to frequent blogs, news sites, and cable channels that promote a perspective they agree with, and to ignore resources they don't like. Such a one-sided approach does not help one become informed, however. Take a few minutes to tune in to those "other" channels and web sites where a different perspective is discussed. Internet portals like Google News or Yahoo News are also helpful in that they offer a variety of links to reputable web sites.

Being informed about the facts doesn't mean you don't agree more with one side than the other. It just means that you can see the various points of view and can even represent them in a discussion, if need be. An exercise I challenge myself to do sometimes is to argue both sides of an issue in my mind, and get a sense from doing so which is more persuasive. A knowledge of the facts also enables you to stick to the core issues in discussions, should you decide to

engage in any.

## Guidelines for Discussions

Impeachment is a time-limited process, but it will have enduring consequences. We might or might not like the outcome, but we will nonetheless have to live with it, and with our family, friends and co-workers as well. They will be with us long after the hearings are done and decisions are made. How we interact with each other during and after the impeachment process will bring us closer together or strain our relationships, perhaps even rupturing some of them. What follows are a few guidelines to help safeguard relationships and even help us to grow in important relationships during this divisive time:

1. *Keep yourself spiritually centered* through prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, worship, etc. Also, limit your exposure to the endless cycle of news and commentary. This will help you be more discerning about what to say, and when. Also, pray for the U.S. and our leadership, that we might come through this a better people and government.
2. If you're not comfortable engaging in these kinds of discussions (or aren't free to do so because of some leadership position), then just say that you're keeping up but would rather talk about something else. *There's no requirement to engage in discussions about impeachment.* Have your explanation ready and rehearse them in your mind so you can gracefully bow out of a conversation if you need to.
3. *Don't bother discussing this topic with people who can't accept disagreements* — especially those who berate you for not agreeing with them. You can try re-focusing the discussion toward facts and their significance, but if this doesn't work, there's no point in continuing. If you don't think your perspective and personhood is being respected, disengage respectfully and promptly. As the wise saying goes, "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1)." Disengage "softly."
4. *Don't get hooked into debating tangential issues* (what-aboutisms, Deep State, Democratic conspiracy, etc.). They might be marginally relevant, but will have no bearing on the outcome of the process. Try to re-focus on the core allegations and rebuttals — what you and the other might think and feel about those.
5. *Really listen* to the other person's thoughts and feelings and acknowledge their point of view by repeating it back to them. "So you think . . ." This will

help them to know that you both hear and respect them. This is usually the missing ingredient in difficult conversations.

6. *When disagreeing, simply state your position without judgment of the other*, staying as close to the facts as possible, and the meaning you give to them. If you believe the other person is mistaken about the facts, point him or her to a resource that could be helpful.
7. *Try to identify points where you and the other agree*, and call attention to this common ground. There are very few discussions where people disagree on everything; usually, there are many points of agreement. This will also help to clarify the areas where you disagree, and the significance you place on those issues.
8. *Regarding areas where you and the other disagree, simply agree to disagree* and then let it go. Move on! Give up your desire to win the debate. Love one another. Have fun together. There's no point in discussing things again unless there's new information that sheds more light on the issue.

You've probably heard it said many times that it's risky to discuss religion and politics, which is why so many shy away from such conversations. But it's also healthy to discuss these topics, as they are of vital importance to us as individuals and a society. If we follow the eight points above, we should be able to actually grow closer to one another during any circumstance.

## **Contact Congress**

Finally, let your U.S. representatives and senators know where you stand on this issue. They all took an oath of office to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic," and the impeachment process is a strong reminder to them of their duty to do so. They are also representing the people of their states and districts, so they need to know what you think and feel and would like them to do. In the end, each of them will be voting their conscience, but your feedback to them can assist in the formation of conscience.

The web site at <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials> is a good starting point for locating the web sites of your elected officials, most of whom include a way to contact them by email via an online web form (or by phone, if you prefer). Be courteous, brief, and straightforward in your communications with them while letting them know what actions you encourage them to take, and why. In most

cases, you will receive a response within a few days.

In closing we recall the words of Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address in 1861. Facing the prospect of civil war, he said:

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

More fundamental than our identification with the Republican or Democratic Party is our identity as Americans and children of God. May the "better angels of our nature" prevail during this time of political crisis.

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