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House announces impeachment investigation of Trump after Craig, others endorse move

By Dan Holtmeyer dholtmeyer@swpub.com Sep 25, 2019



Congresswoman Angie Craig (D-MN2) and Congressman Dean Phillips (D-MN3) listen to regional leaders discuss the challenges of managing water quality standards during a listening session at Prior Lake City Hall in August.

File photo by Meg Britton-Mehlisch

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The House will begin an impeachment investigation into whether President Donald Trump has abused his power for personal and political gain, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Tuesday after U.S. Rep. Angie Craig, D-Minnesota, and other Democrats in Congress voiced their support.

After months of debate among House Democrats over whether to take the step, the final push came from recent media reports and Trump's own admissions that he prodded Ukraine's president to investigate Joe Biden, the former vice president seeking the Democratic presidential nomination, and his son.

Pelosi in her announcement called Trump's actions a "betrayal of his oath of office, betrayal of our national security and betrayal of the integrity of our elections."

The impeachment inquiry would be the umbrella for several House committees' ongoing investigations at once into Trump's dealings, Pelosi said.

In impeachment proceedings, the House eventually votes on whether to formally accuse Trump of wrongdoing, such as abusing his elected office. If it does so, the Senate would essentially act as jury and vote on whether he's guilty and should be removed from office.

Craig, a first-term representative whose district includes Scott County, on Monday said Congress must ensure no one is above the law.

"It is clear that the sitting president of the United States placed his own personal interests above the national security of the United States," she said in a written statement. "And when there is an abuse of power of this magnitude, it is our responsibility to stand up for what is right.

Trump on Twitter called the decision presidential harassment and has said there was nothing wrong with what he said.

A White House memo released Wednesday about Trump's conversation with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in July confirmed much of the substance of Democrats' accusations.

Trump told Zelenskyy he believes Biden stopped a prosecution in Ukraine, a reference to an investigation of the head of a gas company for which Biden's son was a board member during Biden's term as vice president, according to the memo.

"It sounds horrible to me," the memo states Trump said, though the memo is not a verbatim transcript and is based on officials' notes and recollections. Trump went on to say he'll have his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, and U.S. Attorney General William Barr reach out "and we will get to the bottom of it."

"Will the Democrats apologize after seeing what was said on the call with the Ukrainian President?" Trump asked on Twitter. "They should, a perfect call — got them by surprise!"

There is no public evidence of wrongdoing on Biden's part, according to The Associated Press and other news outlets. Biden pushed for the firing of the Ukrainian prosecutor, but many observers found the prosecutor was soft on corruption, not too aggressive against it.

Trump's administration also withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine shortly before his phone call, according to the Washington Post and several Republican senators. Trump this week denied using the money as leverage to get his way.

Craig was among several representatives who newly supported impeachment proceedings Monday and Tuesday, including U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips, another Minnesota Democrat. Minnesota's two senators, both Democrats, have also called for the move.

"This continues a pattern of behavior that is corrupt at best, treasonous at worst, and puts our rule of law at risk," Phillips said in a written statement. "Our Constitution transcends any person, politician, or political party."

Rick Olson, a Prior Lake Republican who recently announced he would challenge Craig for her seat in next year's election, on Wednesday said he saw no impeachable conduct in the memo, though he called Trump's request not "the most appropriate thing to do."

"I am still of the mind that allowing the voters to make the choice is the best way to go," he said, adding the memo and a report from a federal whistleblower about Ukraine will be important pieces of information. "We're already divided enough."

The Ukraine accusations are among the latest in a long line of accusations and ongoing investigations against Trump and his administration of corruption.

Several Democrats have pointed to Trump hotels and other properties, which have been frequently visited by foreign officials, lobbying groups and the U.S. vice president and attorney general. The Ukrainian president, for instance, told Trump he had recently stayed in one of his properties, according to the White House memo.

The accusations also come months after U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller and his team of investigators concluded Russia substantially interfered in the 2016 presidential election, including by stealing Democrat emails and starting fake social media pages and groups to spread misinformation.

"We must safeguard our electoral process and our very democracy from outside threats," Craig said Monday.



Why we covered this story

This week's impeachment announcement was likely the single most important story in the country this week. Why would a local paper cover it?

First, our representative in Congress, Angie Craig, played a notable role in making the story happen. Her coming out in favor of impeachment proceedings — along with the same announcement from Dean Phillips across the river and several other representatives around the U.S. — helped push the inquiry from a hypothetical scenario into reality.

Craig will also play a role in what happens next: whether the House votes to impeach President Donald Trump and send the case to the Senate to remove him from office.

Scott County is in her district, Scott County had a hand in getting her elected, so how she uses her position is important and relevant to Scott County and its cities. Craig and Trump's fans and detractors all have an interest in seeing what's going on.

I believe it's also important to cover such a story from a local perspective rather than just leave it to the bigger outlets. We've met Craig; we've met the man she defeated for her seat; we've met the man, Rick Olson, running against her next year.

I have included Olson's thoughts on these events and quote Trump's response. I cite the White House's own version of what happened with the president of Ukraine, and I cite my other sources of information.

-Dan Holtmeyer

Dan Holtmeyer

Community editor

Dan Holtmeyer is the community editor for the Prior Lake and Savage papers. He grew up in Nebraska and worked as a journalist in Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas before coming to Minnesota in 2018.