

House approves impeachment inquiry rules after fiery floor debate

A sharply divided House voted Thursday to approve a resolution setting “ground rules” for the impeachment inquiry into President Trump, putting lawmakers on record over the contentious process while setting the stage for proceedings to move into the public eye after weeks of closed-door depositions.

The measure passed largely along party lines, 232-196. Two Democrats defected on the vote.

The first formal floor vote in relation to the impeachment probe announced a month ago by Speaker Nancy Pelosi followed a fierce debate in the chamber, where Republicans accused Democrats of launching a de facto “coup” against the president in a “pre-ordained” bid to overturn the results of the 2016 election.

REPUBLICANS ON IMPEACHMENT COMMITTEES RIP ‘SHAM’ PROCESS AHEAD OF VOTE

“A yes vote on this resolution today gives a stamp of approval to a process that has been damaged beyond all repair and a blatant and obvious coup to unseat a sitting president of the United States,” Rep. Ross Spano, R-Fla., said.

Democrats, though, maintained that the president’s own actions – pressing Ukraine to launch politically related investigations, and allegedly using military aid as leverage – brought the country to this point.

“I do not take any pleasure in the need for this resolution,” Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said. “We are here because the facts compel us to be here.”

Showmanship and heated rhetoric marked the lead-up to the vote. Pelosi stood beside a giant placard of an American flag while declaring Congress was “defending our democracy.”

Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., accused Democrats of being part of a “cult,” suggesting Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, D-Calif., is their

leader.

Trump tweeted after the vote: “The Greatest Witch Hunt In American History!”



Donald J. Trump@realDonaldTrump

The Greatest Witch Hunt In American History!

White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham maintained in a statement that the president has done nothing wrong.

“With today’s vote, Speaker Pelosi and the Democrats have done nothing more than enshrine unacceptable violations of due process into House rules,” she said.

READ THE RESOLUTION

No Republicans voted for the measure on Thursday, while two Democrats voted against it: Reps. Jeff Van Drew, D-N.J., and Collin Peterson, D-Minn.

Republicans for weeks had challenged Pelosi to hold a floor vote, complaining the inquiry hasn’t followed past precedent and violates the president’s due process rights. While she finally gave in to those demands in a bid to mute their complaints about process, GOP lawmakers continued to call the inquiry a “sham” while complaining that the newly unveiled rules still limit their authority — including by requiring the consent of Democratic chairs to subpoena witnesses.

McGovern introduced the resolution earlier this week while defending the process and claiming it was not partisan.

“It’s about transparency and it’s about due process for the president,” McGovern said. “Some on the other side will never be satisfied with any process.”

The resolution directs the House Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, Financial Services, Judiciary, and Ways and Means Committees to “continue their ongoing investigations as part of the existing House of Representatives inquiry into whether sufficient grounds exist for the House of Representatives to exercise its constitutional power to impeach Donald John Trump.”

The Democrats’ resolution specifies that Republicans in the minority on the

Judiciary and Intelligence Committees will have the authority, with the concurrence of committee chairs in the majority, to subpoena witnesses and compel their testimony.

DEMS INTRODUCE RESOLUTION FORMALIZING IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY PROCEDURES

If the chair does not consent, the minority can appeal to the full committee. It is common in other proceedings for committee chairs to essentially have veto authority over subpoenas sought by ranking minority members.

The measure also sets the stage for proceedings to move into a public setting soon.

The resolution authorizes the Intelligence Committee to conduct an “open hearing or hearings” in which minority Republicans have equal time to question witnesses.

And, after that hearing is concluded, “to allow for a full evaluation of minority witness requests, the ranking minority member may submit to the chair, in writing, any requests for witness testimony relevant to the investigation described in the first section of this resolution within 72 hours after notice is given.”

McGovern has argued, and maintained on Thursday, that the standards outlined in the resolution are the same as those under the impeachments of both Presidents Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton.

The resolution further directs the Intelligence Committee, in consultation with the other committees, to prepare a report on its findings to the Judiciary Committee, which would write any articles of impeachment. In response to GOP complaints about Democrats’ selective leaks of opening statements and depositions, the document also authorizes the public release of testimony transcripts, with only sensitive or classified information being redacted. The resolution also allows Republican members to submit written demands for testimony and other evidence, to cross-examine witnesses, and raise objections.

Pelosi announced the Trump impeachment inquiry on Sept. 24, saying at the time that “the president must be held accountable” for his “betrayal of his oath of office, betrayal of our national security, and the betrayal of the integrity of our

elections.”

The inquiry was opened after a whistleblower complaint alleged that Trump, during a July phone call, pushed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter as military aid to the country was being withheld.

A transcript released by the White House shows Trump making that request, but he and his allies deny that military aid was clearly linked to the request or that there was any “quid pro quo.” Some witnesses coming before House committees as part of the impeachment proceedings have challenged that assertion.

Fox News’ Gregg Re and Chad Pergram contributed to this report.

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