**What can possibly go wrong in impeachment: everything**

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For the fourth time in American history, impeachment proceedings have been launched against a sitting president. In 1868, eleven articles of impeachment were levied against Andrew Johnson for violating the Tenure of Office Act by firing Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Johnson had vetoed that law; it was overridden; and later declared unconstitutional. Johnson was acquitted in the Senate by a single vote.

Richard Nixon was destroyed by Watergate. While the House did not formally impeach, Nixon knew he would be convicted by the Senate and resigned in August 1974. Nixon was the first and only president to do so. His replacement Gerald Ford was not re-elected in 1976

Bill Clinton was charged with lying under oath and obstructing justice in 1999 over an affair with a White House intern. The vote to acquit was not even close. And Clinton’s popularity soared.

Enter Donald Trump. The trajectory of American politics has been tumbling in the wrong direction where polarization and division are endemic. Trump is loved or hated. The in-between region is largely unpopulated. The now infamous July 25th phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is the cause celebre for Democrats who believe it is a smoking howitzer proving Donald Trump abused power by threatening to withhold military aid in order to solicit foreign assistance in uncovering damaging information on former Vice President Joe Biden.

So what can possibly go wrong? Along with every major newspaper in the country that has chastised the Trump presidency for its failings on one issue or another, this column has been highly critical. The foreign policy decisions to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord; the Transpacific Partnership; the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); to start a tariff war with China; and the general disregard of allies in favor of autocrats have been disastrous for this nation and for global security. America is far less safe and secure than it was three years ago.

Unfortunately, incompetence or blunders do not constitute “high crimes and misdemeanours.” If they did, George W. Bush surely would have been dismissed over Iraq and Lyndon Johnson charged over Vietnam. Instead, Bush was re-elected and Johnson declined to run.

Adam Schiff is hyper-partisan. Rest assured, his investigation will almost certainly uncover evidence of presidential wrong-doing. It may well be that Trump’s Watergate could prove to be his civilian attorney Rudy Giuliani whose interference in Ukraine on behalf of his client may have broken the law much as former Trump campaign advisor Paul Manafort did in different circumstances. Or the “whistle blower’s” well referenced complaint may be the grounds for abuse or obstruction. The question is whether any of these charges rise to the level of “treason, bribery or high crimes and misdemeanors.”

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Regardless of Schiff’s findings and assuming the House votes to impeach, which it may not, will the Senate convict? The record is 0 for 2. Or will the charges be so compelling that Trump, like Nixon is forced to resign? Those who know the president think not.

The House, meaning Speaker Nancy Pelosi, may decide that rather than impeachment, censuring will have greater impact in the 2020 election to discredit the president. But as with the Mueller Report that brought no charges, Mr. Trump will declare a victory if the House fails to impeach.

Suppose, however, that the inquiry proves beyond any reasonable doubt presidential wrong doing and misconduct and that for some reason no matter how unlikely the Senate convicts. Trump is removed from office and Mike Pence replaces him. Would that prevent Trump from running again in 2020? Who knows?

A nation divided against itself cannot stand. One hundred and sixty years ago, Abraham Lincoln correctly predicted civil war. Fortunately, America is not as divided today as it was in 1861. But the partisanship and outright hatred displayed by both parties toward the other, intensified by a president who believes he can determine and interpret the law to fit his needs, suggest that as with BREXIT in the UK, no good outcome from the inquiry is possible.

Tough cases reportedly make for bad law. How these impeachment hearings evolve is unpredictable possibly in the extreme. But if anything can go wrong, bet on that happening.

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