

# A Day In The Life of The Impeachment Drama

October 4, 2019 **by Dan McCue**



Representative Adam Schiff, D- Calif., chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, during a press conference at the U.S. Capitol, Oct. 2, 2019. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON – The scrum of photographers had been waiting for nearly an hour.

Gathered at the railing of a stairwell adjacent to the U.S. Capitol visitor's center, they spoke casually amongst themselves, even as they subtly jockeyed for position and warily eyed the opening to a nearby hallway.

A reporter in the crowd checked her Twitter account, balancing a laptop on the wide staircase railing.

Every so often a plain-clothes security officer asked them to clear a path for Capitol staffers headed determinedly for another part of the building.

If there was a single day that encapsulated all the nuances of the impeachment drama currently gripping Washington, D.C. it was Wednesday, when temperatures outside climbed to a record high, and tensions would eventually bubble over in an unrestrained fashion in the East Wing of the White House.

But the eventful day started here, with a dozen photographers, waiting for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Representative Adam Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, which is overseeing the impeachment inquiry, to emerge from the hallway.

“They’re coming” the security officer said after he first caught sight of them, Pelosi, in a light blue pants suit, and Schiff, in a dark-blue jacket and conservative tie.

“It’ll be some staffers first,” he said as he stepped aside to let the party through.

The entourage moved swiftly through the corridor, headed to a scheduled press conference in the radio and TV correspondents’ studio a few bends in the hallway away.

Pelosi smiled slightly and said a quick hello as she passed, not making eye contact or otherwise engaging. Schiff said nothing. If anything his lips appeared to tighten as he entered the studio green room.

### **SCHIFF WARNS ‘WE’RE NOT FOOLING AROUND’**

Since announcing the start of the impeachment inquiry on Sept. 22, Pelosi has repeatedly told her caucus that they should be

respectful of the gravity of what they've undertaken, potentially removing a sitting president from office.

Arriving behind the podium with Schiff to her right, Pelosi heeded her own advice.

"The impeachment inquiry is nothing to be joyful about," she said. "It is a sad time. And as you've heard me say over and over again, in the dark days of the revolution, Thomas Payne said, 'the times have found us.'"

"Well, the times have found us now," Pelosi continued. "Not that we place ourselves in the category of greatness of our nation's founders, but we do place ourselves in a time of urgency in the face of a threat to the Constitution."

Schiff echoed the Speaker's somber tone, calling this "a fraught time in the history of the Congress. Indeed in the history of the country."

President Donald Trump is the fourth individual in the history of the Republic to face an impeachment investigation.

President Andrew Johnson, a Southern Democrat who had run for vice president with President Abraham Lincoln on a national unity ticket, came into conflict with the Republican-controlled Congress over a number of post-Civil War matters. He was impeached in the House, but was acquitted in the Senate by one vote.

President Bill Clinton was impeached in the House over the Monica Lewinsky affair, but he too escaped conviction in the Senate. And Richard Nixon, of course, resigned before he could be impeached.

Trump is the first person to face this impeachment question on national security grounds — namely that he asked a foreign leader, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, to dig up dirt on a political rival, former Vice President Joe Biden.

Instead of rushing headlong into the topic on everyone's mind in the room, she spoke of other important work the House — and the federal government as a whole — still needed to do — passing legislation to lower prescription drug prices and USMCA, the new Mexico-U.S.-Canada trade agreement.

Schiff said his committee had already begun a series of closed-door interviews with witnesses and had issued multiple subpoenas for documents from the president's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani and others.

“And we want to make it abundantly clear that any effort ... to interfere with the Congress's ability to call relevant witnesses will be considered evidence of obstruction of the lawful functions of Congress,” he said. “More than that, it will create an adverse inference that the allegations contained in the whistleblower complaint are correct.”

“We're not fooling around here,” Schiff added. “We don't want this to drag on for months and months and months, which appears to be the administration strategy. ... They need to know that even as they try to undermine our ability to find the facts around the president's effort to coerce a foreign leader to create dirt he can use against a political opponent, they will be strengthening the case on obstruction.”

## **AT THE WHITE HOUSE, THE WAIT WAS ON**

If there's a simple way to describe the White House Press Room the moment one steps inside on a sunny afternoon, it's probably something like “Bus station, 2 a.m.” As eyes begin to focus the

first thing one sees is people — news anchors, reporters and camera men and women in all manner of dress — quietly waiting in the rows of seats facing a small stage backed by the White House seal.

All around them is a chaos of wires and equipment, the tell-tale sign of work done and work still yet to do.

But already, two hours before the president's scheduled press conference in the Rose Garden alongside Sauli Niinistö, the visiting president of Finland, serious journalism was being done in the warren of cubicles and niches that snake through the rest of the roughly rectangular facility.

On a television monitor, Trump can be seen — and heard — loudly berating the day's pool reporters and House Democrats as he welcomed President Niinistö to the Oval Office.

Even by Trump standards, the display was an unusual show of anger by a man who has repeatedly defended his controversial July call with Ukraine President Zelenskiy as “perfect.”

‘Well, I guess that’s it,’ said a reporter standing nearby. “He’s had his say on impeachment. The press conference will be relatively tame.”

Or so one was tempted to think.

Originally scheduled for the Rose Garden, the joint press conference with Finland's president was moved into the East Room after temperatures outside climbed to 98 degrees.

As they waited on a path outside the West Wing to be escorted inside, reporters and photographers shared shop talk. One photographer spoke of how he/she rode from the Pelosi/Schiff press conference in the Capitol to the White House on a bicycle

on which he also managed to balance his cameras and the small ladder that is a piece of equipment no White House cameraman or woman can do without.

Further down the line, a reporter from Afghanistan sang Afghan songs as she Face-timed with a cellphone on a selfie stick.

Once inside, the unnaturalness of the situation took hold. The room buzzed with excitement, like a much-anticipated opening night, and toward the front, John Roberts from FoxNews, Jim Acosta from CNN, and their counterparts from CBS and NBC all stood at the front of the room doing live reports for their stations.

The din was unsettling, as if one had somehow tuned into a dozen radio stations at once, all at the same volume. And then there was silence. Moments later, Trump and Niinistö entered the room.

“What a big crowd,” Trump said off-mic to Finland’s president.

“I had no idea you were so popular,” he joked. But as Trump turned toward the waiting press and cameras, his jaw locked, protruding slightly forward and it was clear he was still agitated.

About a third of the press conference consisted of Trump recounting his private meeting with Niinistö, a discussion that focused primarily on the future of the Arctic, economic development and the repatriation of the remains and artifacts of native Americans taken to Finland in the 1890s.

Then John Roberts asked if President Trump would cooperate with subpoenas issued by the three House committees investigating the Ukraine phone call.

“I always cooperate,” Trump said. “This is a hoax. This is the greatest hoax. This is just a continuation of what’s been playing out ... since my election. But we’ll work with Shifty Schiff and Pelosi and all of them and we’ll see what happens because we did absolutely nothing wrong.”

The president went on to accuse Schiff of repeatedly mischaracterizing the controversial call, suggesting the House Intelligence chairman “had a mental breakdown” of some kind, should resign, and could be guilty of treason.

“There was no quid pro quo at all,” said Trump who then launched into a monologue of alleged grievances beginning with what he now called the “Mueller collusion delusion” to his releasing an account of the call with Ukraine president that he believes clears him of any wrongdoing, but hasn’t put the matter to rest.

He said after the release of the Mueller Report and the special counsel’s subsequent testimony on Capitol Hill, he got “three days of peace and I’m walking into the United Nations to meet the biggest leaders in the world, and I hear the word, ‘Impeachment.’”

The president claimed he approached reporters waiting outside the UN, believing “maybe for the first time in three years I’ll get a good question.” Instead, the question was, “Now that the House has acted on impeachment, what are you going to do now?”

## **TRUMP ASKED TO DEFINE TREASON**

By this point, Finland’s Niinistö was largely a spectator. Jeff Mason, the White House correspondent for Reuters then rose and asked Trump about his use of the word treason.



“You’ve used it repeatedly in the last few days. Do you consider anyone who opposes you to be treasonous?” Mason asked.

“No, I consider it to be treason when they lie,” Trump said.

“When they stand up and make up a story that’s complete fiction, like Schiff did. He took that perfect conversation I had with the Ukrainian president and he made it into a total lie.

“He [Schiff] is lying about the president of the United States and what the president of the United States has said,” he continued.

“Believe it or not, I watch my words very carefully. There are those that think I’m a very stable genius. And for somebody to get up and totally fabricate a conversation I had with another world leader ... is evil.”

As he spoke, Trump’s face contorted in anger and gestured frequently with his hands.

He then suggested he will “probably .. be bringing a lot of litigation against a lot of people having to do with the corrupt investigation having to do with the 2016 election.”

And he asserted “I have every right to do that because of the way they’ve treated me and other people ... and in the end, after two years and spending \$42 million, they [Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s team] couldn’t find one damn thing about Donald Trump having to do with collusion.”

“I’ve been talking about it for a long time now from the standpoint of bringing a major lawsuit,” the president said.

According to Trump, the investigations have been the toughest on his staff and appointees who “came to Washington to do a great job ... and left dark. They left Washington dark.”



“We won the election and they get served with subpoenas, all the subpoenas,” he said. “Nancy Pelosi hands out subpoenas like their cookies.”

Trump then demanded Mason ask a question of Niinistö.

“Don’t be rude,” the president said.

“No sir. I don’t want to be rude. I just wanted you to have a chance to answer the question that I asked you,” Mason said.

Trump’s face grew ashen.

“It’s a hoax ... and you know who’s playing into the hoax, people like you and the fake news media that we have in this country,” the president said.

“Much of the media in this country is not just fake, it’s corrupt,” he added. “And you have some very fine people too. Great journalists, great reporters. But it to a large extent, it’s corrupt and it’s fake.”

“Ask the president of Finland a question, please,” Trump said.

Mason complied, asking Niinistö what he thought of the ruling earlier in the day by the World Trade Organization that will allow the U.S. to impose sanctions on a wide range of European goods.

Niinistö answered at length and closed by saying he views the United States as “a great democracy.”

“Please remember the president’s last remarks, that we are a great democracy,” Trump said. “And if the press were straight and honest and forthright and tough, we would be a far greater nation.”

At this point, Jim Acosta started to respond to the president, who looked down at him and added, “And we would be far greater

when we don't have the CNNs of the world, who are corrupt people.”

With that, Trump stalked off the stage and out of the room, and