

The West Australian
Wednesday, January 29, 2020

PAGE 13 OPINION

Anti-Trump case falls apart

Weak case looks like bid to protect Democrat hopeful



PAUL MURRAY

America has a long history of involvement in so-called regime change in foreign countries.

A Washington Post article in 2016 accused the US of being involved in more than 80 known overt and covert interventions in foreign elections from 1946-2000 alone.

What has made the Senate impeachment trial of President Donald Trump so unusual is that the party holding the majority in the House of Representatives is now attempting an electoral coup at home.

For once, the target is not a tinpot government in a South American or Caribbean country like Panama, Chile, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic or Grenada.

It's not even some of the bigger fish: Iran, Indonesia — or Iraq. Or, god forbid the fevered imaginings of the Australian Left, Gough Whitlam's government.

So hats off to the reluctant Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker who, ironically, chose to bring down Trump for allegedly seeking foreign intervention in the looming presidential election.

Is anyone else amused that Americans reserve the right to interfere in everyone else's elections, but recoil in moral indignation at the very sniff of someone returning the favour?

This week, they got to see a detailed rebuttal of the case against Trump for the first time, something procedurally denied the President since this charade began.

His personal attorney, Jay Sekulow, blew holes in the main element of the Democrats' accusations: that Trump withheld \$200 million in US aid from Ukraine to force new president Volodymyr Zelensky to hold an inquiry into potentially corrupt business activities within the country involving the son of Democrat presidential hopeful,

Joe Biden. The White House team used evidence obtained by the Democrats — but not cited in the impeachment trial arguments — to expose the false narrative constructed against Trump.

Sekulow listed Trump's practice of withholding overseas aid when it isn't achieving his objectives, which is entirely the President's prerogative:

■ September 2019, \$100 million to Afghanistan over concerns about government corruption.

■ August 2019, all aid to South Korea reviewed over the country's military burden sharing.

■ June 2019, \$550 million to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala over sharing the burden of preventing mass migration to the US.

■ June 2019, \$105 million to Lebanon over national security policy concerns.

■ September 2018, \$300 million to Pakistan for not meeting its counterterrorism obligations.

But then came the killer blow. Trump's

lawyers proved conclusively from the testimony of four witnesses that the Ukrainians didn't learn of the hold on the aid until well after the July 25 phone call that sparked the whistleblower complaint.

The witnesses reported a flurry of inquiries from Kiev only after the delay was reported on the Politico website on August 28. Nothing before.

"The Democrats accused the President of leveraging security assistance to supposedly force President Zelensky to announce investigations," deputy presidential counsel Mike Purpura said.

"But how can that possibly be when the Ukrainians were not even aware that the security assistance was paused? There can't be a threat without the person knowing he's being threatened.

"There can't be a quid pro quo without the quo."

He nailed the lid shut later: "So what did President Trump and President Zelensky discuss in the July 25 call?"

Two issues, burden sharing, corruption.

"Just as importantly, what wasn't discussed on the July 25

call? There was no discussion of the paused security assistance."

A nebulous report about a disgruntled ex-ambassador's unpublished, axe-grinding book doesn't change that analysis, but just confuses arguments about calling witnesses.

What is now open to conjecture is that the Democrats have been running a protection racket for Biden, masquerading as an impeachment process.

Deputy counsel Patrick Philbin raised the issue of the credibility of the whistleblower, who had access to the July 25 phone call, and who has been accused of political bias by the Inspector-General of the Intelligence Community.

"We don't know exactly what the political bias was because the Inspector-General testified in the House committees in an executive session, and that transcript is still secret," Philbin said.

But, for the first time, he outed the whistleblower as "an intelligence community staffer who worked with then vice-president Biden on Ukraine matters."

Asking a foreign government to investigate suspicions of corrupt behaviour by Americans — even if Trump's fears were misplaced — is within the President's powers and is not an impeachable matter.

The aid was paid within the approved Congress deadline and no Biden inquiry took place.

There's simply no impeachable offence in the two articles, as was so elegantly — and devastatingly — argued yesterday by retired Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, the leading constitutional expert.

Certainly, a successful investigation might have damaged Biden's election prospects, clearing the field for Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren. Is that what Pelosi really fears?



There's simply no impeachable offence in the two articles.

MORE OPINION
PLUS Aiston P26-27

Time we work to help end the age of throwaway plastic

Some experts believe that by 2050 our oceans will contain more plastic than fish, based on the estimated eight million tonnes of land-based plastics that end up in the world's oceans each year.

Plastic doesn't go away — items just break into smaller and smaller pieces called microplastics, which eventually make their way into our food, drinking water and even the air we breathe.

A study by the University of Newcastle found we are inhaling about 2000 tiny pieces of plastic each week — an amount equivalent to the weight of a credit card.

GARY MARTIN



Plastic rubbish, particularly of a single-use variety, is everywhere we work and forms a significant part of the throwaway culture that pervades many of our workplaces.

Watch one colleague drink from a single-use plastic water bottle, another sip a skinny latte from a disposable plastic cup complete with plastic lid and plastic drink stirrer, and two team members walk in

each with a plastic tray holding not just their plastic lunch box but also a plastic soft drink bottle and plastic straw protruding from the top. It all adds up.

Visit the office kitchen and you will find cling wrap, bin liners, plastic bowls and single-use cups.

Single-use plastics have long been a concern amid widespread recognition of their negative impact on the environment. Today, there is a growing rage against the use of single-use plastics along with increased awareness of the massive carbon footprint associated with the

manufacture of plastics. In the short term, bosses who fail to act on reducing the wastage associated with single-use plastic will not just risk alienating customers but also fall out with employees and struggle to attract new talent. Bosses can kickstart the process by conducting an inventory of single-use plastic items alongside raising awareness of single-use plastics and the damage they cause the environment.

Follow up by encouraging workers to talk about office wastage, provide filtered tap water, make re-usable items available in office kitchens and

canteens, and favour procurement from suppliers who use less plastic wrapping and packaging. Collective workplace efforts will help reduce the carbon footprint associated with production of single-use plastic items and prevent many from ending in landfills and oceans. Those efforts will create a ripple effect of positive change among peers, competitors, within industry and the broader community, and help end the age of throwaway plastic.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive of the Australian Institute of Management WA