News




President Donald Trump holds up a newspaper with the headline that reads "Trump acquitted" as he speaks in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Thursday, Feb. 6, 2020. (AP/Patrick Semansky)

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Exulting in his impeachment acquittal, President Donald Trump took a scorched-earth victory lap Feb.6, unleashing his fury against those who tried to remove him from office while looking ahead to his reelection campaign.

Trump, triumphantly waving a newspaper front page — "ACQUITTED" — denounced his political foes, declared the impeachment proceedings a "disgrace" and portrayed himself as a victim rather than a president accused of serious corruption. That echoed broadsides hours earlier that stunned the crowd at an annual prayer breakfast.

"It was evil, it was corrupt," Trump declared at the White House. "This should never ever happen to another president, ever."

"We went through hell, unfairly. We did nothing wrong," he continued.

Trump vented about his grievances against the impeachment process and ticked off names of the "vicious and mean" people he felt had wronged him: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff and former FBI Director James Comey. But then he reveled in the verdict delivered by the GOP-controlled Senate the day before.

"Now we have that gorgeous word. I never thought it would sound so good," Trump said. "It's called 'total acquittal."

As Trump spoke, nearly every inch of the White House East Room was packed with supporters. Among them: Republican senators who cast some of the votes to acquit him, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Rep. Chuck Grassley, several Cabinet members, including Attorney General William Barr and Treasury Secretary Steve

Mnuchin, and staunch House allies including Reps. Jim Jordan, Devin Nunes and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

Going one by one, Trump spent nearly a half hour in rambling remarks saluting GOP lawmakers who backed him both in the Capitol and on television.

He declared that the Republican Party has never been more unified and that the momentum from the acquittal would carry him to reelection this November. But he also predicted that he may have to fend off another impeachment challenge, perhaps for something as trivial as jaywalking.

"We'll probably have to do it again because these people have gone stone-cold crazy," the president said.

Earlier, speaking from a stage where he was joined by congressional leaders, including Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who led the impeachment charge against him, Trump shattered the usual veneer of bipartisanship at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington.

"As everybody knows, my family, our great country and your president have been put through a terrible ordeal by some very dishonest and corrupt people," Trump said at the annual event.

"They have done everything possible to destroy us and by so doing very badly hurt our nation," said Trump, who triumphantly held up copies of two newspapers with banner "ACQUITTED" headlines as he took the stage.

His remarks were especially jarring and whiplash-inducing coming after a series of scripture-quoting speeches, including a keynote address by Arthur Brooks, a Harvard professor and president of a conservative think tank, who had bemoaned a "crisis of contempt and polarization" in the nation and urged those gathered to "love your enemies."

"I don't know if I agree with you," Trump said as he took the microphone, and then he proceeded to demonstrate it.

"I don't like people who use their faith as justification for doing what they know is wrong," he said in an apparent reference to Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, a longtime Trump critic who cited his faith in becoming the only Republican to vote for Trump's

removal.

"Nor do I like people who say 'I pray for you' when you know that is not so,'" he said, in a reference to Pelosi, who has offered that message for the president when the two leaders have sparred publicly.

The House speaker shook her head at various points during Trump's remarks, but did not appear to interact with Trump personally. Earlier she had offered a prayer for the poor and the persecuted.

At the White House later, Trump defended his prayer breakfast attacks on Pelosi, saying "I had Nancy Pelosi sitting four seats away and I'm saying things a lot of people wouldn't have said. I meant every word."

Pelosi said after that Trump's remarks were "so completely inappropriate, especially at a prayer breakfast.." She took particular issue with his swipe at Romney's faith and said that yes, she does pray for the president.

His comments were a clear sign that the post-impeachment Trump is emboldened like never before as he barrels ahead in his reelection fight with a united Republican Party behind him. And it stood in stark contrast to the apology offered by Bill Clinton in the aftermath of his own impeachment acquittal in 1999.

Clinton said then in a White House address: "I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and on the American people."

Trump had avoided talk of impeachment in his State of the Union address on Tuesday night, holding his tongue until the Senate had cast its official acquittal vote.

By the next day, he was already moving to use impeachment as a 2020 rallying cry.

Trump tweeted after the Senate vote that he would mark his acquittal with a statement to the nation at noon Feb.6 to "discuss our Country's VICTORY on the Impeachment Hoax!" The president's supporters were being invited to join him at the East Room event.

Asked what Trump would say, White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham told Fox News Channel that he would talk about "just how horribly he was treated, and you know, that maybe people should pay for that."

"People should be held accountable. The Democrats should be held accountable," she said. "People need to understand what the Democrats did was dishonest and it was corrupt."

The president and his allies have been on a victory lap since Wednesday, sending giddy tweets needling his accusers and Democrats and celebrating.

Indeed, the night of the impeachment vote was one of revelry for members of the president's circle. In Washington, many, including Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, his girlfriend, former Fox News host Kimberly Guilfoyle, and the president's former campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, gathered at the president's hotel a few blocks from the White House, one of the few MAGA safe zones in the deeply Democratic city.

The president himself remained at the White House but worked the phones, calling several confidants to exult about the verdict, bitterly complain about Romney and to promise that his Feb.6 noon statement would not want to be missed, according to a person familiar with the calls but not authorized to speak publicly about private discussions.

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