

The Impeachment Process: A Plain Language Explainer

What Impeachment Means



The people who wrote the Constitution wanted to make a way to get rid of presidents who did such bad things that they shouldn't be president anymore. The process of removing presidents who do bad things is called impeachment, but impeaching is not the same as removing. To impeach just means to be accused of doing bad things.

Like in a trial for a criminal, a jury has to agree the president did the bad things before he can be punished by removing him from office.



Before Donald Trump, two other U.S. presidents had been impeached



Andrew Johnson and



Bill Clinton. Neither of them was removed.

What The House of Representatives Does



The House of Representatives acts like the police would for a criminal. House Committees look for clues and talk to witnesses (people who may have seen the crime), then decide if they think the president has done something bad enough to deserve to be removed. The House Judiciary Committee writes Articles of Impeachment (charges of what the president did) and gives them to the full House to vote on. If most of the House members agree the president should be removed and vote yes on the charges, the president is impeached.

On December 18, Donald Trump was impeached on two charges:

1. for abusing his power as president by trying to get the country of Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden by not giving them the help he was supposed to.
2. for "obstructing Congress" by not answering their questions or not giving them things they ask for, and not letting people who work for him do so either.



What The Senate Does



Once the president is impeached by the House, his trial is held in the Senate. A trial is showing proof to a judge and jury that someone is innocent or guilty. The Senate is like a jury in a criminal trial. Members of the House will try to convince the Senators that the president is guilty and should be removed. The president's lawyers will try to convince the Senators that he is not guilty and should stay president.

The Senate will decide what the rules for the trial will be, like who can testify and what things Senators can see.



The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will be there to make sure the rules are followed. At the end of the trial, the Senators will vote on whether the president is guilty. If sixty-seven (67) Senators vote guilty, he will be removed from office and the Vice President, Mike Pence, will become president.