The Senate Votes to Acquit President Trump

The impeachment trial against President Trump concluded on Wednesday, as the Senate voted to acquit him of both articles of impeachment. The voting tally on the first article, abuse of power, was 52-48 not guilty, with all Democrats and Senator Mitt Romney voting to convict the President, and all other Republicans voting to acquit. The second article, obstruction of Congress, was voted down on a pure party line, 53-47 for acquittal. The Senate's vote to acquit the president ends a four-month long saga that began in September when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi launched an impeachment inquiry after an anonymous whistleblower complaint shed light on a phone call between President Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The impeachment trial in the Senate was centered around the battle over whether or not to call more witnesses. Democratic Senators and the impeachment managers from the House argued that it was the Senate's constitutional duty to subpoena witnesses to testify, and momentum for this gathered after former National Security Advisor John Bolton revealed additional information about the President's misconduct in a forthcoming book. Republicans successfully voted down a motion to subpoena witnesses, with most Republican senators admitting that while the President had acted inappropriately, his conduct did not meet the standards for impeachment, and it was in the best interest of the nation to conclude the trial quickly. Additionally, Republican senators pointed to the fact that the Democrat-controlled House was unwilling to wait for a court to adjudicate whether executive privilege allowed individuals to defy a subpoena, and it was not then the Senate's responsibility to do so.

Despite the results of the vote turning out roughly as expected, there were multiple senators who were undecided until the days and hours leading up to the vote. Democrat Doug Jones of Alabama, who faces the most difficult re-election campaign of all incumbents in 2020, voted to convict the president on both counts. As did Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a Democrat who was being targeted by Republicans to add bipartisanship to the president's acquittal. Republican Senators Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), and Susan Collins (Maine) were both considered targets for the Democrats to convince to vote with them, but each voted with their Republican colleagues on both counts. The only senator to break ranks with their party was Mitt Romney, who delivered an emotional speech on the Senate floor declaring his conscience demanded he vote to convict the president of abuse of power. Senator Romney said that the president's actions were the most "abusive and destructive violation of one's oath of office imaginable." With his vote to convict, Senator Romney became the first senator to ever vote to remove a president of their own party.

An underlying theme of the trial in the Senate was an acknowledgment from Republicans that President Trump had acted improperly, but that his actions were not severe enough to warrant being the first president to be removed from office. Additionally, senators pointed to the 2020 election being mere months away to say that the American people should be the judge of presidential misconduct at that time. President Trump cited his acquittal as a monumental victory, but Democrats warned that his presidency would always have an asterisk next to it, and the Senate had failed to do its job by not calling witnesses at the very least.