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Exclusive: Ukrainian tycoon's lawyer says he lent money to Giuliani associate



Inside C2

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'Defend democracy': Pelosi calls Trump 'ongoing threat' in impeachment debate



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) speaks ahead of a vote on two articles of impeachment against U.S. President **Donald Trump** on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., in a still image from video December 18, 2019. House TV via REUTERS

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Wednesday called Donald Trump a threat to American democracy who left Congress no choice but to impeach him as bitterly divided lawmakers debated before historic votes on charges accusing the Republican president of abusing his power and obstructing Congress.

With billowing partisan differences on full display, the Democratic-led House of Representatives launched a planned six hours of debate on the two articles of impeachment arising from the president's actions toward Ukraine.

Trump would become the third U.S. president ever to be impeached. That would set the stage for a trial in the Republican-led Senate next month, with House members acting as prosecutors and senators as jurors. A conviction would result in his removal from office, but the Senate's top Republican has said there is "no chance" of that happening.

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On the House floor, Pelosi read the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance, then said, "today we are here to defend democracy for the people," to applause from fellow Democratic lawmakers. As the debate unfolded, Trump on Twitter called the proceedings "AN ASSAULT ON AMERICA" and on his party.

Trump, who has denied wrongdoing, later added of Pelosi: "Will go down in history as worst Speaker."

While the House twice previously has voted to impeach presidents - Bill Clinton in 1998 and Andrew Johnson in 1868 - no president has ever been removed from office via impeachment.

Separate votes on the two charges are expected in the early evening. The votes are expected to fall almost entirely along party lines, with Democrats in favor and Republicans opposed.

In speeches on the House floor, Republicans defended the president and accused Democrats of seeking to use an unfair, rigged process to nullify the results of the 2016 election in which Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton. The House voted down a Republican bid to adjourn and a motion accusing Democrats of violating the chamber's rules.

"If we do not act now, we would be derelict in our duty. It is tragic that the president's reckless actions make impeachment necessary," Pelosi added.

"He gave us no choice. What we are discussing today is the established fact that the president violated the Constitution. It is a matter of fact that the president is an ongoing threat to our national security and the integrity of our elections - the basis of our democracy," Pelosi said. House Democrats accuse Trump, 73, of abusing his power by asking Ukraine to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in the November 2020 election. Trump is also accused of obstructing the House investigation by directing administration officials and agencies not to comply with subpoenas for testimony and documents related to impeachment.

Republican Representative Mike Rogers said, "The matter before the House today is based solely on a fundamental hatred of our president. It's a sham, a witch hunt - and it's tantamount to a coup against the duly elected president of the United States."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) speaks ahead of a vote on two articles of impeachment against U.S. President Donald Trump on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., in a still image from video December 18, 2019. House TV via REUTERS

The debate underscored the deep divide in Congress over Trump's conduct during his tumultuous presidency and the larger political schism dividing the United States.

Republican Representative Barry Loudermilk invoked the name of Jesus during the debate. Referring to the ancient Roman provincial governor who presided over the trial of Jesus and ordered the crucifixion, Loudermilk said,





WORLD NEWS

Exclusive: Ukrainian tycoon's lawyer says he lent money to Giuliani associate

DUBAI (Reuters) - A lawyer for a Ukrainian oligarch on Wednesday said he had lent \$1 million to Lev Parnas, an associate of U.S. President Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, and Parnas' wife in order for them to buy a home in Florida.

FILE PHOTO: Ukrainian oligarch Dmytro Firtash arrives at court in Vienna, Austria, February 21, 2017. REUTERS/Heinz-Peter Bader In his first public comments on the transaction since it was revealed by U.S. prosecutors this week, the Dubai-based lawyer, Ralph Isenegger, said in an emailed statement to Reuters that the interest-bearing loan was a personal business transaction.

"The funds were entirely mine and I was not acting in this matter at the request of or on behalf of any of my clients or indeed anyone else," he said in the statement.

Isenegger is a lawyer for Dmytro Firtash, one of Ukraine's wealthiest businessman who is fighting extradition by U.S. authorities on bribery charges from Vienna, where he has lived for five years.

U.S. prosecutors said Ukraine-born U.S. citizen Parnas, who has been charged with campaign finance violations, concealed the payment from them. Parnas, who is under house arrest in Florida, denied hiding it.

Parnas was charged alongside another Florida businessman, Belarus-born Igor Fruman, with illegally funneling money to a pro-Trump election committee and other politicians. Fruman and Parnas have pleaded not guilty.

Giuliani has said Parnas and Fruman assisted him in investigating Trump's political rival Joe Biden and Biden's son Hunter, who served on the board of a Ukrainian energy company.



FILE PHOTO: Ukrainian oligarch Dmytro Firtash arrives at court in Vienna, Austria, February 21, 2017. REUTERS/ Heinz-Peter Bader

Isenegger said Lev and Svetlana Parnas had requested the \$1 million loan in August this year and that it was extended to them in five installments of \$200,000 with a 5% interest rate. The loan is repayable in full by 2024, he added.

According to court filings, the account into which the payment was deposited was in the name of Parnas' wife.

Prosecutors said in court the loan was meant for Parnas, not his wife. They said it was not plausible the lawyer would extend "an unsecured, undocumented loan to a housewife with no assets."

Isenegger on Wednesday said the loan was made in full before Parnas's arrest. "I then requested the return of the funds, but neither Mr. Parnas nor his wife has responded to my request," he said.

"This was a personal business transaction between myself and Lev and Svetlana Parnas...
Mr Parnas asked to keep the loan confidential, so I told no one else about it."

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-Jennifer Lai, M.D.

Dr. Lai is a board-certified pediatrician who earned her medical degree from The University of Texas School of Medicine in San Antonio and completed her pediatric internship and residency at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. She is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Her special clinical interests include General Pediatrics, caring for newborns, managing autism, and treating childhood obesity. She cares for young patients at Kelsey-Seybold's Tanglewood Clinic, near the Galleria.

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Editor's Choice



Soccer Football - 2019 EAFF E-1 Football Championship - South Korea v Japan - Busan Asiad Stadium, Busan, South Korea - December 18, 2019 South Korea Young-Gwon Kim celebrates with the trophy



Japanese journalist Shiori Ito holds a banner reading "Victory" outside the Tokyo District Court after a court verdict in Tokyo



A riot police officer fires tear gas towards demonstrators during a protest against a new citizenship law in Seelampur, area of Delhi, India December 17, 2019. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



A demonstrator is detained by members of the security forces during a protest against Chile's government in Santiago, Chile December 17, 2019. REUTERS/Ivan Alvarado



Participants prepare for the annual London Pantomime Horse Race in Greenwich, London, Britain, December 15, 2019. REUTERS/Tom Nicholson NO RESALES. NO ARCHIVES TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



U.S. President Donald Trump attends the annual Army-Navy football game at Lincoln Finnanical Field in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.



Fans of Universidad de Chile soccer club take part in a protest against Chile's government in Plaza Italia in Santiago, Chile, December 14, 2019. REUTERS/Andres Martinez Casares TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



A riot police officer chases a demonstrator during protests against Chile's government in Santiago, Chile, December 14, 2019. REUTERS/Ricardo Moraes TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

Thursday, December 19, 2019



COMMUNITY

Astronaut Is Accused Of Accessing Her Wife's Bank Account From The International Space Station

NASA Investigates The First Possible Alleged Criminal Activity In Space



Overview

Bitter Divorce Battle on Earth Led to Claims of a Crime in Space

Astronaut Anne McClain was accused of accessing her estranged wife Summer Worden's bank account while she was in space.

Worden filed an identity theft complaint with the FTC against McClain.

Her parents also filed a complaint with NASA's Inspector General.

McClain said that she was just checking up on Worden's finances.

Worden's parents claim that McClain's actions were part of a custody battle over her son, who she gave birth to a year before the couple were married.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

NASA is looking into claims that an astronaut accessed her estranged wife's bank account from space during a sixmonth stint on the International Space Station.

Decorated astronaut and US Army lieutenant colonel Anne McClain has been accused of improperly gaining access to Summer Worden's online bank account using NASA computers, the New York Times reported.

McClain allegedly accessed the bank account as part of a 'highly calculated and manipulated campaign' to obtain custody of Worden's son, who she had given birth to about a year before the couple got married.

Worden, a former Air Force intelligence officer, brought a complaint against McClain with the Federal Trade Commission, claiming that McClain had committed identity theft, even though none of Worden's funds had been tampered with.

She told the Times that she discovered McClain's actions after becoming curious about how McClain knew details about the way she'd been spending her money, even though they were separated and McClain was orbiting the earth.



Astronaut Anne McClain has been accused of improperly accessing her estrange spouse's financial information while on the International Space Station earlier this year

Worden's parents went a step further, filing a complaint against McClain with NASA's Office of Inspector General, al-

leging identity theft and improper access to Worden's private financial records.

Last week, McClain, who is back on terra firma, sat down for an under-oath interview with the inspector general, during which she was said to have admitted that she did access Worden's banking information.

However, McClain apparently claimed that she was just doing something she had always done while she and Worden were still a couple - checking in on Worden's finances to make sure that there was enough money to support Worden's child, who they had been raising together.

McClain claimed that she was using the same password that she had always used during their relationship and that she had not been told to stop accessing Worden's bank account.



McClain's (left) estranged spouse, Summer Worden (right), filed an identity theft complaint with the FTC over the incident, while Worden's parents lobbed a complaint to NASA's Inspector General, claiming it's part of McClain's efforts to gain custody of Worden's child.

McClain and Worden married in 2014, with Worden filing for divorce in 2018 after McClain accused her of assault, a claim which Worden denies and said was part of McClain's efforts at gaining custody of her son. The assault case was eventually dismissed.

Worden had previously denied Mc-Clain's attempts to adopt the boy even after they'd gotten married.

In Worden's parents' complaint, they said that McClain's actions were part of a 'highly calculated and manipulative campaign' to obtain custody of Worden's

son, who she had given birth to about a year before the couple got married.

McClain's lawyer told the Times that McClain 'she strenuously denies that she did anything improper' and cooperating with the investigation.

Worden told the New York Times that the FTC had not yet responded to her identity theft claims, but that investigators were accessing her family's complaint to NASA.

NASA officials declined to comment on its Office of the Inspector General's actions regarding the claims against Mc-Clain.

Ms. Worden put her intelligence background to work, asking her bank about the locations of computers that had recently accessed her bank account using her login credentials. The bank got back to her with an answer: One was a computer network registered to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.



McClain claimed that claimed that she checked on Worden's bank account to make sure there were enough funds for the care of Worden's son, who they raised together while married.

Ms. Worden's spouse, Anne McClain, was a decorated NASA astronaut on a six-month mission aboard the International Space Station. She was about to be part of NASA's first all-female spacewalk. But the couple's domestic troubles on Earth, it seemed, had extended into

Ms. McClain acknowledged that she had accessed the bank account from space, insisting through a lawyer that she was merely shepherding the couple's still-intertwined finances. Ms. Worden felt differently. She filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission and her family lodged one with NASA's Office of Inspector General, accusing Ms. McClain

outer space.

of identity theft and improper access to Ms. Worden's private financial records. Investigators from the inspector general's office have since contacted Ms. Worden and Ms. McClain, trying to get to the bottom of what may be the first allegation of criminal wrongdoing in

"I was pretty appalled that she would go that far. I knew it was not O.K.," Ms. Worden said.

The five space agencies involved in the space station — from the United States, Russia, Japan, Europe and Canada — have long-established procedures to handle any jurisdictional questions that arise when astronauts of various nations are orbiting Earth together. But Mark Sundahl, director of the Global Space Law Center at Cleveland State University, said he was not aware of any previous allegation of a crime committed in space. NASA officials said they were also unaware of any crimes committed on the



Astronaut Anne McClain back on earth.

Ms. McClain, now back on Earth, submitted to an under-oath interview with the inspector general last week. She contends that she was merely doing what she had always done, with Ms. Worden's permission, to make sure the family's finances were in order.

"She strenuously denies that she did anything improper," said her lawyer, Rusty Hardin, who added that the astronaut "is totally cooperating."

The domestic dispute in space may be the first such investigation, but it is unlikely that it will be the last.

"The more we go out there and spend time out there," A NASA spokesman said, "all the things we do here are going to happen in space." (Courtesy https://www.msn.com and https://www.dailymail.co.uk)



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BUSINESS

Pork Industry Ready To Cash In On "Phase One" U.S.-China Trade Deal



Illustration/Axios

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The U.S. pork industry — whose commodity was among the hardest hit by China's retaliatory tariffs — breathed a sigh of cautious relief following news of a deal that winds down tensions between the U.S. and China.

Why it matters: The deal in theory is a reprieve for farmers, a key part of President Trump's base who have borne the brunt of the trade war. China's purchases of goods like soybeans and pork have waned in the nearly two-year battle pushing rural America into a financial tailspin in an otherwise solid economy.

Driving the news: U.S. officials said China would up annual purchases of U.S. farm goods to at least \$40 billion over a period of two years.

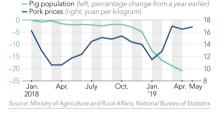
•But there are no details yet on which goods it'll buy or how China plans to absorb that level of imports. The most China ever purchased from U.S. producers was \$29 billion in 2013, per Bloomberg. •Hog futures — along with other commodities — rose 1% on news of the deal. Industry experts say the ceasefire could create new prospects for farmers — but won't undo the missed opportunity to cash in on China's pork shortage, partly due to African swine fever.

•Pork exports to China haven't "accelerated at the rate that it could have if we didn't have these [trade] obstacles," Joe Schuele, head of communications at the U.S. Meat Export Federation, an industry trade group, tells Axios.

The backdrop: The trade war coincided with a breakout of African swine fever, a deadly pig disease that killed hundreds of millions of hogs in eastern Asian countries, as Axios' Jacob Knutson reported earlier this year.

•Pork prices in China surged triple digits from the prior year in November. The jump in prices pushed China's overall inflation index to rise at the quickest pace in about eight years, per the latest data from the Chinese government.

China's plunging pig population sends pork prices soaring



Data: China's monthly consumer price index via FactSet; **Chart: Axios Visuals**

•The epidemic had China — the world's top pork consumer — looking offshore to fill the supply gap, a potential goldmine for U.S. farmers.

•U.S. ramped up herds in anticipation of more demand, with processors slaughtering about 1 million more pigs per week than a year ago, per Reuters.

Yes, but: The U.S. pork industry faced three rounds of retaliatory tariffs. In 17 months, tariffs on pork exports to China increased sixfold (from 12% to 72%).

•That made it less palatable for Chinese buyers to turn to the U.S. for help, but not totally out of the question.

•Those that did import from the U.S. sometimes pushed the price hikes back onto U.S. packers and producers - making it less profitable to export to China, Schuele says.

As a result, European suppliers have capitalized much more on China's pork shortage. So has Brazil.

What's next: "We're encouraged that a deal has been reached and we're anxious to get the details," Schuele says — a sentiment echoed by the industry's most prominent trade groups.

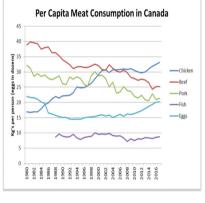
•There may be some opportunity to take advantage of China's upcoming all-important Lunar New Year celebration, which tends to be the country's biggest period of pork consumption. (Courtesy

Related Chicken consumption is closing in on the red meat market

axios.com)

Data: USDA, National Chicken Council; Chart: Axios Visuals

Per Capita Meat Consumption in Canada



Popeyes only makes up a small portion of profits for owner Restaurant Brands International, but the success of its chicken sandwich could change the calculus for the brand.

The big picture: Chicken has been an increasing share of Americans' diets since the 1980s when doctors began

warning that eating too much saturated fat from red meat could increase the risk of heart disease.

•Last year more poultry than red meat was eaten by U.S. consumers per capita, with chicken almost closing the gap with a combination of beef, pork, veal and mutton/lamb by itself.

•Popeyes already is growing faster than both Restaurant Brands International's Tim Hortons and Burger King, according to Q2 results.

•The intrigue: Chicken also has become much less expensive in recent years, driving a surge in buying from cashstrapped U.S. workers who have seen the costs of health care, education and housing skyrocket while their paychecks have stayed roughly the same.



Popeves Chicken sandwich.

•"In 1960 a pound of chicken cost half as much as a pound of beef. This ratio has now fallen to one-third," the Economist notes.

•"The proliferation of antibiotics in industrial agriculture allows farmers to keep chickens in denser and dirtier conditions than ever before. A study by Martin Zuidhof from the University of Alberta found that the average broiler chicken, raised for meat, weighed 4.2kg at 56 days of age in 2005, up from just 0.9kg in 1957." (Courtesy axios.com)





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