

International

The senate Republicans, vital for Trump, lay low as scandal rages

Constituent frustration appeared to catch some Republicans off guard

WASHINGTON: Most Republicans in the US Senate have taken the path of least resistance — staying silent — as they grapple with President Donald Trump's swirling impeachment firestorm. In a way they hold the key to Trump's political fortune: Should the president get impeached by the Democratic-led House of Representatives, he would then face a trial in the Senate, the Republican-held chamber he views as his firewall.

While Democrats unite in outrage over the US leader's latest brazen move, a public call for China to investigate his political rival Joe Biden and his son, outright condemnation by Republicans was rare. Republican senators' silence signaled to those in their home states that while many in Trump's party may be uncomfortable with his willingness to flout political norms and seek foreign help in the 2020 election, they were offering a form of quiet defense of the president.

Constituent frustration appeared to catch some Republicans off guard, including Senator Joni Ernst, who seeks re-election in 2020. "You still stand there silent and your silence is supporting him," one person told Ernst at a town hall Thursday in her state of Iowa. "Where is the line?" asked voter Amy Haskins. "When are you guys going to say, 'Enough?' 'I can't speak for him,'" parried Ernst. "But you can speak for yourself," Haskins interrupted.

Pressed for a reaction to Trump's bald suggestion Thursday that China, and earlier Ukraine, investigate his potential 2020 White House challenger, Ernst reverted to the unfounded White House talking point that the Bidens were involved in corruption in those countries. "Corruption, no matter where it happens, must be fought everywhere," she said. Senator Marco Rubio downplayed the controversy, suggesting Trump might have even made the China comments in jest. "I don't know if that's a real request or him just needing the press," Rubio said.

While neutral reactions or indirect support of Trump have been common this week, full-throated backing is more elusive. Loyal ally Senator Lindsey Graham hesitated to defend Trump's call for China to investigate the Bidens, but he sought to explain the request. "It's the president pushing back," Graham told The Washington Post. "He feels like everyone is coming after him all the time and he hasn't done anything wrong."

'Wrong and appalling'

The president issued a barely veiled warning Friday to those who hold the majority in the Senate, where he would be tried if impeached by the House. "We have a great relationship in the Senate," he said. "I have a 95 percent approval rating in the Republican Party," Trump added. While he has yet to speak to many sena-

tors on the issue, Trump said, "I believe the senators look at this as a hoax." Few Senate Republicans are openly castigating him, and election politics is likely a significant reason why. Twenty-three Republican Senate seats are in play in 2020, compared to just 12 for Democrats, and those in the GOP standing for re-election are loath to cross a president who enjoys an extremely loyal base. But some voices are rising up to challenge him.

Trump's "brazen and unprecedented appeal to China and to Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden is wrong and appalling," tweeted prominent Senator Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential nominee in 2012 and currently the party's most open critic of Trump. Fellow Republican Ben Sasse, at greater risk because he is up for re-election next year, issued some of the harshest language yet attacking Trump's China comments.

"Hold up: Americans don't look to Chinese commies for the truth," Sasse told the Omaha World-Herald. "If the Biden kid broke laws by selling his name to Beijing, that's a matter for American courts, not communist tyrants running torture camps." The fiery comments made headlines, but they may not move the needle. For Trump to be ousted by the Senate, a unified Democratic caucus will need to at least 20 Republicans to defect to their side, a target that currently appears unlikely to be met. — AFP



WASHINGTON DC: US President Donald Trump speaks to the press as he departs the White House in Washington, DC, for his annual visit to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, on October 4, 2019. — AFP

Canada Tory leader slammed over dual US citizenship

OTTAWA: He was supposed to be touting his tough stance on crime but Canadian opposition leader Andrew Scheer found himself on the back foot Friday as his announcement was overshadowed by questions over his dual nationality. The Conservative, who is aiming to unseat Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals in the October 21 election, has been on the defensive since disclosing Thursday that he is part-American.

As he unveiled plans for a crackdown on gangs and illegal firearms, his audience at a Toronto news conference appeared much more interested in his heritage. "Everyone who knows me, or knows my family, knows that my father was born in the United States. I've been open with that. And so that's that," Scheer told reporters. But that, apparently, is far from that.

In cosmopolitan Canada, it is no impediment to high office to have roots in other countries — but Scheer has sparked anger by leaving it so late in the campaign to front up with the public. "It's not a big deal in Canada for people to have dual citizenship," Scheer said. "There's millions of Canadians who had one or more parent born in another country."

Scheer said he decided after becoming Conservative leader in 2017 to renounce his US citizenship. He only submitted the paperwork in August, however — just before the election campaign kicked off. Critics have also highlighted what they see as double-standards: in past elections, Conservatives have attacked leaders of the New Democratic Party and Liberal Party because of dual citizenship. Scheer himself in 2005 criticized the dual French-Canadian nationality of Canada's former governor general Michaëlle Jean.

"It should not disqualify you, but you must be honest when you're looking to become prime minister of a country of 37 million," said Trudeau, who was on his own campaign stop in Quebec City. "Andrew Scheer should tell the whole truth." The Liberal campaign, meanwhile, played up the controversy to attack Scheer's plan to address rising gun violence, accusing him of wanting to bring in "American-style gun laws for Canada." Scheer is proposing minimum five-year jail terms for possession of a smuggled firearm and said he would list gangs as criminal entities in much the same way terrorist groups are proscribed.

In the early evening, Scheer's party also announced it had expelled election candidate Heather Leung for homophobic remarks. "Recent media reports have brought to light offensive comments made by Ms Leung saying 'homosexuals recruit' children and describing the sexual orientation of the LGBTQ community as 'perverted,'" said a party statement. "There is no tolerance in the Conservative Party for those types of offensive comments." — AFP



MONTREAL: Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada Andrew Scheer addresses the press after the French debate for the 2019 federal election, the "Face-a-Face 2019+" presented in the TVA studios. — AFP

Chile's drought killing thousands of farm animals

PETORCA: For Erick Hurtado, the worst thing about the drought that has devastated his family farm in Chile is the dead animals. "Going out and seeing the animals dead on the ground is so horrible," Hurtado says as he gazes across the dusty paddocks of his farm in Petorca, near the coastal city of Valparaíso. Farmers are counting the cost of one of the driest austral winters in six decades, which has destroyed crops and left tens of thousands of farm animals dead in the fields of central Chile.

Hurtado's farm, owned by his grandfather, has lost half its 60 head of cattle. So far, 106,000 animals have died due to lack of water and fodder, mostly goats, cattle and sheep, according to the agriculture ministry. President Sebastian Pinera, who last month announced a \$5 billion plan to improve water distribution, this week set up a crisis group of government agencies to tackle the water crisis, which he said had become "more extensive and more intense."

In Colina, north of the capital Santiago, the drought has been hard on small farmers. Scrawny cattle pick at sprigs of straw grass on pastures that have turned to dust. Cows, goats and horses roam hungry on hills have turned to a dry muddy brown. "The drought has been disastrous for us," said Sandra Aguilar. Her family owned about a hundred head of cattle.

Today, only half survive thanks to a trickle of water provided by a neighbor who still has some reserves. "The situation is complicated," said Javier Maldonado,



COLINA: A newborn goat is seen next to an empty trough to be filled with drinking water at a farm, in Colina some 35 km north of Santiago. — AFP

governor of the province of Chacabuco, where several agricultural areas have been hit particularly hard by the drought. "We have to be realistic, climate change is here to stay," he said.

Water shortages

Dominga Mondaca points out the deep fissures that run through the garden behind her house in the village of La Ligua near Valparaíso. The garden used to be full of strawberries and citrus trees; now it's cracked earth. "We have had many years with little water. But the last year, it didn't rain at all," said the 73-year-old, one of more than 600,000 people the government is supplying by tanker trucks as part of emergency measures.

She says she has had to give up raising chickens, in order to keep what little water she and her husband receive for their own consumption, washing and cleaning. Whatever is left, she uses to sprinkle on herbs in a small kitchen garden. The agriculture ministry says 37,000 family farms need assistance in the central Chile.



LOS ANGELES: Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren speaks at the SEIU Unions for All Summit. — AFP

Warren 2020 fundraising beats Biden

WASHINGTON: Democrat Elizabeth Warren raised a solid \$24.6 million in third-quarter contributions to her 2020 White House campaign, her office said Friday, easily out-raising frontrunner Joe Biden and rivaling fellow progressive Bernie Sanders. The July-to-September haul came from 943,000 donations with an average contribution of \$26, Senator Warren's presidential campaign said in a statement.

Warren, who has risen dramatically in the polls in recent months and is now battling Biden for the top spot in the Democratic nomination race, has prided herself on not accepting contributions from corporations or holding closed-door fundraisers with wealthy donors. "Instead, she got to spend her time traveling across the country, hosting town halls, taking tens of thousands of selfies, and hearing directly from people about what's on their minds — and people like you chipped in to help make it possible," Warren campaign manager Roger Lau said.

The numbers are in line with the massive haul claimed

by fellow Senator Sanders, who raked in \$25.3 million for the period, the most of any Democratic 2020 candidate. The 78-year-old Sanders put his White House bid on hold this week to be treated for a blocked artery — but his wife said Thursday he was recovering well and plans to participate in this month's Democratic debate. Sanders announced his fundraising figures earlier in the week but on Friday noted the historic nature of his candidacy, which his campaign said has had to fight the establishment "doubt" that he can win the White House.

"At this point in the campaign, Bernie has received more contributions from more individuals than any candidate in the history of American presidential politics," campaign manager Faiz Shakir said. But Republicans are quick to claim that they are leading the 2020 money race. The Republican National Committee said that it and Donald Trump's re-election campaign raised a stunning combined total of \$125 million in the third quarter, a presidential fundraising record.

Biden, whose campaign has struggled to retain pole position over the past month, announced Thursday that he had raised \$15.2 million for the quarter, behind Sanders, Warren and South Bend, Indiana's centrist Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who raised over \$19 million. Biden in recent weeks has been caught in the maelstrom as Trump faces an impeachment inquiry over accusations he pressed Ukraine for damaging information on the former vice president and his son. — AFP

Thirsty avocados?

In Petorca, some rivers have run dry, and the landscape has been left parched, but lush avocado and citrus plantations are nevertheless thriving. Locals in Petorca say the real, long-term problem is the mismanagement of water resources. "There is an excess of monoculture plantations that consume all the water," said Diego Soto of the Movement for the Defense of Access to Water, Land and Environmental Protection (MODATIMA) said.

Avocados need a lot of water to grow, said Soto. "An avocado tree needs 600 liters of water per week, whereas humans consume 50 liters a day, or 350 liters a week," he said. Producers refute these figures and say the real problem is a lack of infrastructure to store water, both above and below ground. "The avocado is not a crop that needs more water," insisted Francisco Contardo, chairman of the local producers' committee. Avocados are a key export for Chile, mostly to the US and China, but drought has reduced exports by 25 percent.

Less snow

For many though, the changes being wrought by climate change are overwhelmingly obvious. Snow in the highlands of central Chile was relatively scarce this year. Scientists predict an average decrease of between five and 10 percent snowfall every 10 years in almost the entire Andes mountains, one of the country's main sources of water. "The central zone of Chile is highly dependent on the summer melt season, its snow and glaciers, which means that if the snow cover is reduced, there is also a reduction in the availability of water resources," said Paul Cordero, climate change expert at the University of Santiago. Weak snowfall forced the country's main ski resorts to use artificial snow machines much earlier and more often this season than in previous years. "Chile has been living as if it were a country with an abundance of water," said Pinera. "Climate change and global warming have changed this situation probably forever." — AFP

UK urges US to return diplomat spouse involved in fatal accident

LONDON: Britain has urged the United States to "reconsider" allowing the wife of an American diplomat to leave the country after she became a police suspect in a fatal road crash. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said he had raised the case directly with the US ambassador to London Woody Johnson, after American officials reportedly allowed the woman to flee to the US.

"I have called the US ambassador to express the UK's disappointment with their decision, and to urge the embassy to reconsider it," Raab said in a statement. Harry Dunn, 19, died on August 27 after his motorbike collided with a car near a Royal Air Force base in Northamptonshire used by the US military as a communications hub. His Kawasaki motorbike hit a Volvo SUV travelling in the opposite direction, according to local police. It confirmed that a 42-year-old American woman being treated as a suspect in their investigations had left Britain. Media reports suggested she had claimed diplomatic immunity. Northamptonshire Police Superintendent Sarah Johnson said her force had followed usual procedures in the case, including "liaising closely with the suspect".

"(She) engaged fully with us at the time and had previously confirmed to us that she had no plans to leave the country in the near future," Johnson said. "Due process was also followed in seeking the necessary documentation to allow for the arrest and formal interview of the suspect," she added. Johnson said the force was now "exploring all opportunities through diplomatic channels" to ensure that the investigation continued.

Britain's Sky News reported that Dunn's family had received a letter from Ambassador Johnson expressing "profound sadness" at the death. Harry Dunn's father, Tim Dunn, told the broadcaster the family were "disgusted" and "appalled" at the suspect's behavior. "I'm angry that someone could do this and then get on a plane and go," he said. "I can't believe she's living with herself." — AFP