

CLINTON IS CLEARED

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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He is. Impeachment is an accusation of wrongdoing. The House of Representatives voted to impeach Clinton, and that cannot be reversed. On Dec. 19, House members approved two articles of impeachment: one that accused Clinton of obstruction of justice and another one that said he perjured himself. After a trial, the Senate did not convict Clinton on either article, so he will remain in office. He's still impeached but still in power.

Recent news reports have said Independent Prosecutor Kenneth Starr may bring criminal charges against Clinton for the same offenses the Senate rejected. This could happen; a Senate trial is not a criminal trial. Punishment for criminal conduct - even by a president - is left to the regular courts. If found guilty, Clinton could be fined or go to jail. But Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) predicts Starr won't indict Clinton. "I think for the good of the country, probably forget it," he told reporters.

FULL TEXT

The Senate has voted, and President Clinton can keep his job.

In only the second presidential impeachment trial in history, the Senate on Friday acquitted Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice. The voting ended a five-week trial in which senators debated whether the president lied to a grand jury and covered up his affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Before votes were taken, each of the articles of impeachment was read for a final time. Then Chief Justice William Rehnquist asked: "Senators, how say you? Is respondent William Jefferson Clinton guilty or not guilty?"

One by one, senators rose from their seats and declared "guilty" or "not guilty."

In the end, the vote count fell far short of the 67 votes, or two-thirds majority, needed to convict the president on either impeachment article. Senators voted 50-50 on the article accusing Clinton of obstruction of justice. The vote for perjury failed by a 55-45 vote.

Shortly after the votes were taken, senators also rejected an effort by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) to censure the president. The censure would have condemned Clinton for "shameful, reckless and indefensible" behavior.

Still, many senators, even those who voted to acquit Clinton, said they aren't happy with his behavior. "History should, and I suspect, will judge that William Jefferson Clinton dishonored himself and the highest office in our American democracy," Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) said.

THE PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE

After all votes were counted on Friday, President Clinton knew he would hold the White House for two more years. But instead of claiming victory for his acquittal on impeachment charges, he apologized.

He apologized for the Monica Lewinsky affair and his deceptions about it. And he asked the American people for forgiveness. "I want to say again to the American people how sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events, and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and the American people," he said.

Clinton also said he hoped the acquittal would signal "a time of reconciliation and renewal for America."

Even the president's chief prosecutor, Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), seemed eager to get the impeachment process behind him. He called the experience "a downer from A to Z."

IS PRESIDENT CLINTON STILL IMPEACHED?

He is. Impeachment is an accusation of wrongdoing. The House of Representatives voted to impeach Clinton, and that cannot be reversed. On Dec. 19, House members approved two articles of impeachment: one that accused Clinton of obstruction of justice and another one that said he perjured himself. After a trial, the Senate did not convict Clinton on either article, so he will remain in office. He's still impeached but still in power.

What's next for the president?

It's hard to say how history will view the Clinton presidency. History books will note that Clinton is one of only two presidents ever to be impeached (Andrew Johnson (left) was the other in 1868). The president will keep his job. But this doesn't mean his troubles are over. He still could face criminal charges stemming from the Monica Lewinsky affair. Plus, he could face a censure from the Senate. Lawmakers may reconsider the issue when they return to the Capitol after break, although some Democrats said it was unlikely.

What is a censure?

It's a resolution passed by Congress that shows disapproval. It's drafted and passed the same way as any House or Senate bill, but doesn't have the force of law. It carries no specific penalties. "Censure is the Senate saying, 'The president behaved badly and we disapprove,'" said Robert Bennett, professor of law at Northwestern University.

What other punishment could he face?

Recent news reports have said Independent Prosecutor Kenneth Starr may bring criminal charges against Clinton for the same offenses the Senate rejected. This could happen; a Senate trial is not a criminal trial. Punishment for criminal conduct - even by a president - is left to the regular courts. If found guilty, Clinton could be fined or go to jail. But Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) predicts Starr won't indict Clinton. "I think for the good of the country, probably forget it," he told reporters.

IMPEACHMENT TIME LINE

Here are key events in the investigation against the president.

Dec. 19

Monica Lewinsky is subpoenaed to appear at a deposition for the Paula Jones suit and to turn over gifts from President Clinton. Jones filed a suit in May 1994 alleging Clinton sexually harassed her.

Jan. 7

Lewinsky signs affidavit for Jones case saying she had no sexual relationship with Clinton.

Jan. 12

Linda Tripp, a friend of Lewinsky, gives Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's office taped conversations between herself and Lewinsky. The tapes contain conversations about Lewinsky's relationship with Clinton.

Jan. 16

Court panel gives Starr authority to investigate the Lewinsky matter.

Jan. 17

Clinton testifies in Paula Jones' lawsuit and denies a relationship with Lewinsky.

Jan. 27

Starr opens grand jury inquiry.

Aug. 6

Under immunity for prosecution, Lewinsky testifies for the first time to the grand jury.

Aug. 17

Clinton is questioned by grand jury, then admits in a televised speech to having had "an inappropriate relationship" with Lewinsky.

Sept. 9

Starr tells House leaders he has found "substantial and credible information that may constitute grounds for impeachment."

Dec. 11-12

House Judiciary Committee approves four articles of impeachment.

Dec. 19

House votes to impeach Clinton on one count of perjury and one count of obstruction of justice.

Jan. 7

Chief Justice William Rehnquist opens Senate trial proceedings.

Jan. 27

Senate rejects a motion to dismiss charges against Clinton and authorizes witnesses.

Feb. 12

Senate votes to acquit Clinton of both articles of impeachment.

Illustration

PHOTOS 9; Caption: PHOTO: Paula Jones. PHOTO: Linda Tripp. PHOTO: Kenneth Star. PHOTO: President Clinton. PHOTO: Judge Rehnquist. PHOTO: Monica Lewinsky. PHOTO: (Congress in session.) PHOTO: (Andrew Johnson.) PHOTO: (President Clinton.) PHOTO: (President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.) GRAPHIC: How each senator voted. Senators voted twice: first on perjury charges, then obstruction of justice charge. A vote is for "guilty;" a no vote is for not guilty." - See microfilm for complete graphic.

DETAILS

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