

● **BREAKING** WATCH LIVE: PRESIDENT TRUMP
SPEAKING FROM WHITE HOUSE

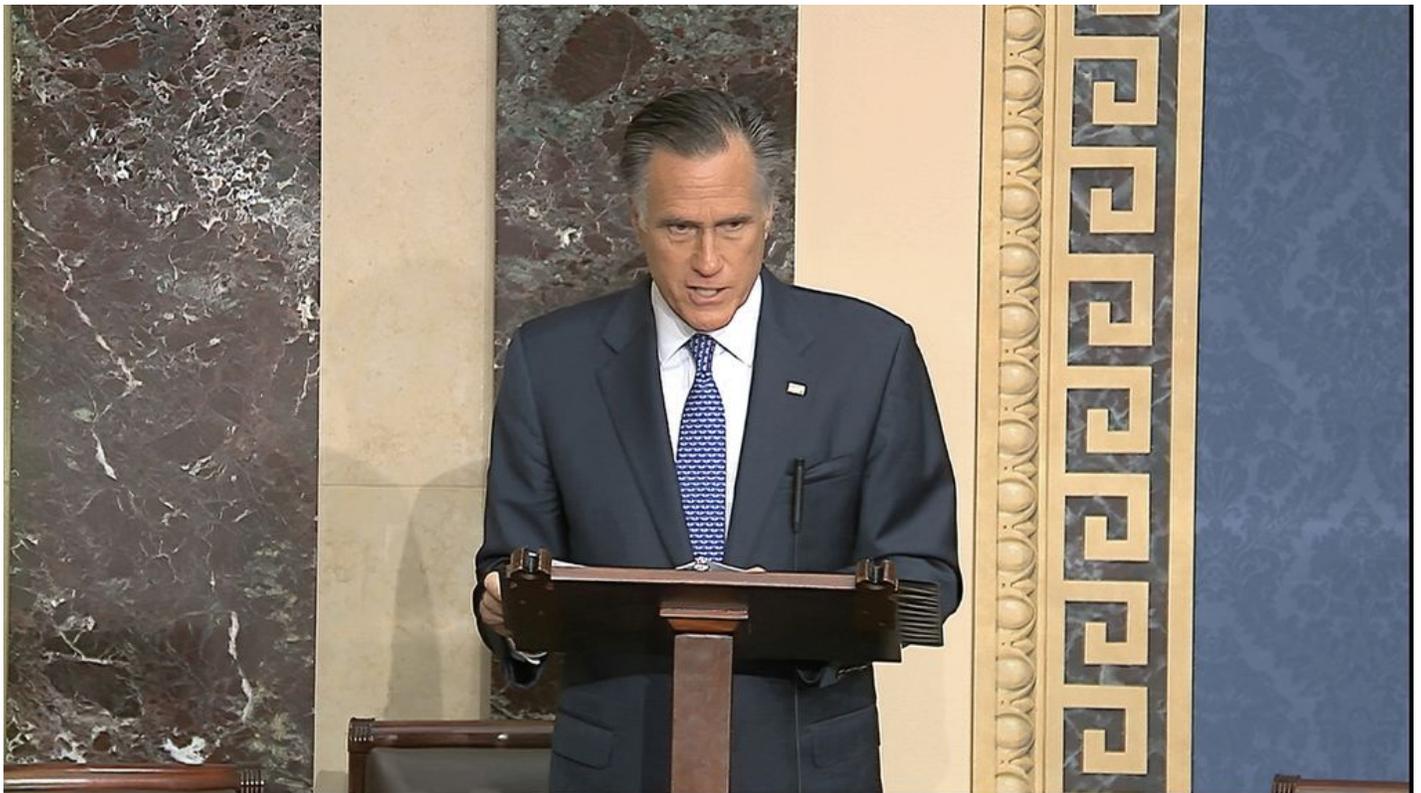
BREAKING: WATCH LIVE: PRESIDENT
TRUMP SPEAKING FROM WHITE HOUSE

OPINION

Thank you, Mitt Romney

Romney recognized that each of us has a calling greater than our political ambition.

By [Michael A. Cohen](#) Globe Columnist, Updated February 6, 2020, 2 hours ago



In this image from video, Senator Mitt Romney speaks on the Senate floor about the impeachment trial against President Trump at the US Capitol on Feb. 5. ASSOCIATED PRESS

“Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change.”

These words spoken by Robert F. Kennedy more than five decades ago in Canetown

These words, spoken by Robert F. Kennedy, more than five decades ago in Cape Town, South Africa, were [invoked](#) Wednesday morning by Democratic Senator Doug Jones of Alabama. They came as he announced that he would vote to convict President Trump of high crimes and misdemeanors.

Quite unexpectedly, these words also came to describe someone on the other side of the political aisle — Willard Mitt Romney, who became the first senator in American history to vote to convict a president of his own political party in an impeachment trial.

Over the years, I've been a frequent [critic](#) of the 2012 Republican presidential nominee — and often deservedly so. During that presidential campaign he told a room full of wealthy donors that [47 percent of Americans](#) were moochers who failed to take “personal responsibility” for their lives. He flip-flopped on climate change, immigration, even his own signature health care bill. The man who courageously spoke out against Trump in the Spring 2016, [happily welcomed](#) his endorsement when he ran for the Senate in 2018.

But on Wednesday Romney did something honorable, patriotic, and courageous that merits nothing but praise.

Unlike his fellow Republicans who vacillated between saying Trump did nothing wrong or excusing his abuse of power, Romney made clear that integrity demanded a different course of action. “Were I to ignore the evidence that has been presented and disregard what I believe my oath and the Constitution demands of me for the sake of a partisan end, it would, I fear” said Romney, “expose my character to history’s rebuke and the censure of my own conscience.”

Romney did something that so many of his Republican colleagues have repeatedly shown that they cannot do — put country and conscience over party loyalty and personal ambition.

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Since the impeachment inquiry against Trump began last fall, the outcome was never in doubt. Republicans would hold the line and Trump would be acquitted.

But what has been at stake in impeachment — and indeed Trump's entire presidency — is less about him and more about how America's political system would respond to his behavior. How would Republicans respond to man incapable of introspection who has and will continue to debase the office he holds and diminish the nation he leads?

It's a test that Republican politicians — and Republican voters — have consistently and spectacularly failed. Every outrage has been excused; every corrupt or classless act explained away — even if in [private](#) Republicans understand all too well the danger that Trump represents.

Trump's acquittal — even in the face of massive evidence of wrongdoing — was the logical conclusion of four years of GOP cowardice and political nihilism.

But like Jones, who is a Democratic senator in one of the reddest states in America and did himself no political favors in voting for conviction, Romney finally recognized that each of us has a calling greater than our political ambition. It's a recognition that House Democrats made months ago when they began impeachment proceedings against the president — even as they knew how it would turn out. That Romney's political career is filled with moments of political expediency cannot be erased away; but it cannot cause us to deny or downplay acts of true political courage today.

This has not been an easy week in American political history. The Iowa caucus was a disastrous failure. The State of the Union was a disgraceful spectacle of lies, norm shredding and naked partisanship. Trump was acquitted at the end of a sham trial that amounted to a political cover up. The wheels of the American experiment feel as though they are coming off.

Finding glimmers of hope and reasons for optimism seemed practically Panglossian.

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in some respects, praising Romney's courage only highlights how debased our political culture has become. Doing the right and honest thing shouldn't be reason for hosannas. It should be the least that we expect from our elected leaders.

But we don't live in that America right now. We live in an America dominated by the moral obscenity that resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. And at a moment when a Republican member of Congress doing the right and honest thing is such an unusual occurrence, Romney's actions — along with those of Jones and the entire Senate Democratic caucus — are reason for, to quote that same Robert F. Kennedy speech, a tiny ripple of hope.

Michael A. Cohen's column appears regularly in the Globe. Follow him on Twitter [@speechboy71](#).

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