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Trump acquitted in historic impeachment trial

Longtime foe
Mitt Romney
votes against
president

WASHINGTON, AFP

President Donald Trump was acquitted by the US Senate on Wednesday following a historic impeachment trial that shone a harsh light on America's divisions, without ever shaking the loyalty of his voter base.

In a political triumph for the US leader, Trump drew on staunch Republican support to easily defeat a Democratic effort to expel him from office for pressuring Ukraine to help bolster his re-election effort.

The president immediately claimed "victory" while the White House declared it a full "exoneration" – and Democrats rejected the acquittal as the "valueless" outcome of an unfair trial.

But the vote in the Senate showed just how solid a grip the former real estate mogul holds over the Republican Party – an asset nine months before he seeks a second four-year term.

Even though several conceded Trump's behaviour was wrong, Republicans ultimately stayed loyal in voting to clear



President Donald Trump holds up a newspaper with a headline that reads "Trump acquitted" during the 68th annual National Prayer Breakfast at the Washington Hilton on Thursday. AP/PTI

the president of charges of abuse of power, by 52 to 48, and of obstruction of Congress, by 53 to 47 – far from the two-thirds supermajority required for conviction. "Two-thirds of the senators present not having found him guilty of the charges contained therein, it is therefore ordered and adjudged that the said Donald John Trump be, and he is hereby, acquitted," said Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who presided over the trial.

One Republican, Senator Mitt Romney, a longtime Trump foe, risked White House wrath to vote alongside Democrats on the first count, saying Trump was "guilty of an appalling abuse of public trust." He voted not guilty on

the second charge. Trump's impeachment and trial will leave a permanent stain on his record, as it did for the only two presidents to have encountered the same fate, Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1998.

But the Senate verdict was never truly in question since the House of Representatives formally impeached Trump in December, and it has now cleared out a major hurdle for the president to fully plunge into his campaign for re-election in November.

Responding to the verdict, Trump announced he would deliver a formal statement on Thursday from the White House "to discuss our country's victory on the impeachment hoax!" The president

had earlier tweeted a montage depicting a spoof cover of *Time* magazine declaring him president for all eternity. Trump later tweeted a video attacking Romney, the first senator in US history to support convicting a president from his own party.

While the White House declared that Trump had obtained "full vindication and exoneration," Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, warned that by clearing Trump Republicans had "normalised lawlessness."

"There can be no acquittal without a trial, and there is no trial without witnesses, documents and evidence," said the top Democrat in Congress – who a day earlier ripped up her copy of Trump's State of the Union address on live television.