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'Sordid saga' approaches final act with vote scheduled for today

WASHINGTON (AP) — With acquittal assured, the Senate talked its way through a third and final day of closed-door deliberations Thursday at President Clinton's impeachment trial, set for climactic noontime votes Friday in the case that one Democrat called "this sordid saga."



CLINTON

A steady stream of lawmakers came forward to announce their intentions for the roll calls on perjury and obstruction of justice, dividing largely along party lines on presidential guilt or innocence but offering nonpartisan condemnations of Clinton's behavior with Monica Lewinsky.

"There can be no doubt that President Clinton's conduct has made a mockery of most of his words, or that his example has been corrosive beyond calculation to our culture and to our children," said Oregon Republican Gordon Smith, who said he would vote to convict.

"No one, not any senator in this chamber nor any person in this country, will look at this president in the same way again," said Democrat Dick Durbin of Illinois, who said he would vote for acquittal on both charges.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman said he had concluded that Clinton's "wrongdoing in this sordid saga does not justify making him the first president to be ousted from office in our history."

The Connecticut Democrat had

commanded nationwide attention last September with highly critical words about Clinton's behavior at a time the White House still hoped to avoid congressional action.

For all the expressions of disgust, a formal effort to censure the president appeared all but dead, a victim of Republican opposition. Democrats said they would make an effort to force a post-trial vote on the Senate floor, and failing passage, would draft a statement of condemnation.

A two-thirds vote is required to convict the president and remove him from office, and there was no chance of that happening. Instead,

Two moderate senators — Olympia Snowe of Maine and Susan Collins of Maine —

to disclose their decision.

Another moderate, Oregon, stepped forward the day to say he would vote to convict.

"I refuse to say that the polls and some indexes give license to high places who act in legal ways," he said.

Among Democrats, aides said the only question was whether Robert C. Byrd of Virginia, a longtime ally, would break ranks and

**"It is deeply troubling that the process of this constitutional process as an opportunity for reevaluation"**

whatever suspense lingered at the end of the five-week trial was whether either article of impeachment would attain a bare majority — a psychological threshold that had no bearing on Clinton's fate.

Three Republicans, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, John Chafee of Rhode Island and James Jeffords of Vermont, announced on Wednesday they would not vote for conviction on either article.

Sen. Slade Gorton of Washington has announced he will vote against the perjury charge, but in favor of the obstruction charge.

publicans in voting on Clinton's impeachment.

Controversy broke out in the House when Clinton's attorney, Vernon Riffe, announced that Clinton would not appear in person at the trial.

White House spokesman Andrew Young said Clinton's attorney, Vernon Riffe, announced that Clinton would not appear in person at the trial.

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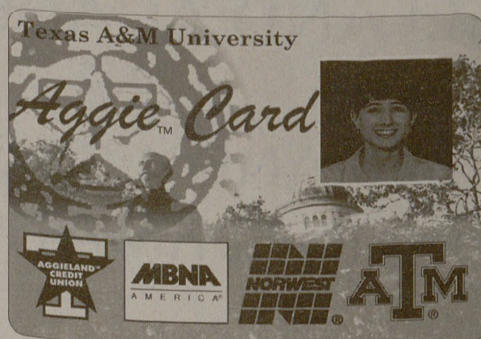
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