

Impeachment trial of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton begins

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The impeachment trial of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton began on Tuesday in the Texas State Senate. Paxton pleaded not guilty to each of the 16 articles of impeachment. He was impeached by the Texas State House in May by a vote of 121-23, at which time he was suspended from office pending the outcome of the trial.

Paxton was initially impeached on 20 articles of impeachment. Four of the articles have been placed on hold, so the trial will be on the remaining 16 articles. These include charges of bribery, abuse of the judicial process, and the firing of whistleblowers. Most are related to his alleged use of office to benefit Nate Paul, a wealthy Austin, Texas real estate developer who has donated money to Paxton's campaigns.

The impeachment session held in the Texas House in May had been preceded by hearings held in semi-secrecy and caught nearly everyone in Texas off guard. Paxton himself apparently learned of it only days before the House proceedings began, when he accused House Speaker Dade Phelan of public drunkenness and called for Phelan's resignation.

The proceedings began with senators rejecting a motion by Paxton's attorneys to dismiss all of the articles by a 24-6 vote. All six of the votes in favor of dismissal were from Republicans, while the 24 votes against were evenly split between the 12 Democrats in the Senate and twelve Republicans.

There are actually 31 members of the Texas Senate, with the Republicans holding a 19-12 edge. However, Paxton's wife Angela is a member of the Senate, and was barred from voting or participating in the proceedings, according to the impeachment trial rules created after the impeachment. She is allowed to be present on the Senate floor during proceedings, which is significant; if she were not present, only 20 votes

would be required to impeach her husband, while her presence requires 21 votes in favor of impeachment.

Whether she will stay on the floor watching the trial is uncertain, since several of the charges against her husband relate to his providing assistance to Paul's business operations in return for Paul facilitating and covering up for an extramarital affair the attorney general was conducting—while at the same time making hypocritical speeches about the decisive importance of marriage and the family.

By a 22-8 vote, senators also rejected a pretrial motion to exclude all evidence from before January 2023. Paxton's lawyers advanced the theory that he could not be charged for anything that occurred before his most recent reelection in November 2022, on the grounds that voters already knew of many well-publicized aspects of his corruption when they returned him to office, and thus had already delivered their "verdict."

Paxton's corruption is well known; he has been under criminal indictment for securities fraud since 2015. Clearly, Texas legislators did not suddenly see the light. Paxton is a close ally of Donald Trump, and spoke at Trump's rally on January 6, 2021, before a mob of Trump supporters stormed the capital building in Washington, D.C. as part of Trump's attempt to overthrow the government. The fact that so many Republican legislators support the impeachment indicates that much more is afoot than simply the removal of a corrupt politician.

Donald Trump Jr. offered his support of Paxton, in the form of a not-so-veiled threat on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), in which he stated, "I'm looking forward to the upcoming 2024 primary season. RINO hunting season starts soon!!!" RINO is a term used by Trump and other ultra-right Republicans

meaning “Republicans In Name Only.” Paxton had assisted Trump’s attempts to have the election results thrown out in several states.

The split in the right-wing underlying the impeachment is shown by the first witness called by the impeachment managers. Jeff Mateer is a former high-ranking member of the Office of the Attorney General. Mateer is a member of the Federalist Society, an organization of far-right lawyers who have planned and carried out the ultra-right takeover of the judiciary. He is currently an attorney with the First Liberty Institute that has litigated on behalf of far-right Christians. Most recently they represented Joseph A. Kennedy, a high school football coach in Washington state who was fired for leading his players in prayer after games. In 2017, President Trump nominated Mateer as a federal judge; the nomination was derailed after comments made by Mateer came to light, in which he said that transgender children were part of “Satan’s plan.”

The trial is expected to last two to three weeks. Prosecutors and Paxton’s defense have each been allowed 24 hours to present their cases. Mateer’s testimony was cut short on the first day after a dispute broke out between attorneys regarding what exhibits could be introduced into evidence. A ruling on this matter had not been issued at the end of the day’s proceedings.

Presiding over the trial is Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. A fascistic politician himself, Patrick has already ruled that Paxton cannot be forced to testify in the trial, and that Paxton did not have to be present for the proceedings. Paxton was present for the morning session but did not show up in the afternoon.

This is only the third time in history that anyone has been impeached in the Texas state government. The first was in 1917, when then-governor James Ferguson was removed from office. The second was in 1975, when a judge was impeached.



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