

The cost for civil servants who do their duty in impeachment inquiry? \$15,000 is a start | Column

Moral integrity comes at a personal cost as well a professional one, writes an Eckerd College professor.



Former Ambassador William Taylor leaves a closed door meeting after testifying as part of the House impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump, on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2019. [ANDREW HARNIK | AP]

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Ambassador William Taylor and Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch had to overcome serious impediments before testifying at the congressional impeachment inquiry hearings. These civil servants had first-hand information vital to the investigation, yet to speak out came with high costs. Their testimonies would bring the wrath of President Donald Trump, who has called those who speak out not only disloyal but “human scum.” They also faced a huge financial cost necessary to hire top quality lawyers to guide them through the “morning-to-dusk sessions” before the congressional committees. For each of these individuals, the cost of testifying can be \$15,000 or more, which on a civil-servant salary is a huge hit.

Yet, despite these personal pressures and high risks, Taylor, Yovanovitch and many other State Department civil servants are risking their careers, financial stability and the scathing rebuke of the president in order to cast a bright light on their perceptions of corruption and unethical behavior in the current administration. Beyond Ukraine policy, additional public servants throughout the government are standing up to the politicization of their work.

There are most likely dozens (if not hundreds) of others in the U.S. government who would also like to speak out with their knowledge of immoral, and in some cases illegal, policies of the Trump administration. Yet, the pressures to remain silent are often overwhelming. Civil servants are expected to pursue the public interest and loyally carry out the priorities of the elected government efficiently and effectively.

There are four additional factors that make it extremely difficult for other civil servants to speak out about the corruption and abuse of power in the Trump administration. First, it is quite natural for an individual to want to succeed in the State Department or elsewhere in the government. Speaking out and raising disagreements to the government’s policies is rarely the best avenue for promotion. Second, most of us feel that our first ethical duty is to take care of ourselves and our families. If speaking out against government policy jeopardizes one’s livelihood and well-being, it might seem better to keep quiet.

Third, profound feelings of inadequacy often arise when one takes a stand against the government. An individual may feel: “Who am I to stand up and say that the experts working for the president on this issue are wrong?” And fourth, the central moral value prized in the American political system is loyalty. The rewards of public life go to those who are perceived as “loyal” to the president and to the institutions of government. For all of these reasons, it is extremely hard for individuals in the government to speak out publicly in opposition to administration policies.

So, three cheers for those today who have bravely told the American people the truth about our President’s actions in Ukraine and those who have brought to light the politicization of many other branches of government. The actions of these valiant individuals may actually lead to the impeachment of this president.

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