Impeachment Is A Defining Issue

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The upcoming vote in the House of Representatives on a resolution to impeach President Clinton is a defining issue that will be remembered in the 2000 election. It's comparable to the Senate vote on April 18, 1978 to give away our canal in Panama.

Out in the highways and byways of America, most people know that it's unacceptably inappropriate for Congress to shirk its responsibility and allow Clinton to hide his misbehavior behind perjury, obstruction of justice, and illegal defenses designed to stonewall investigations.

It's obvious that Clinton intended to lie and to conceal the truth, and that he did, in fact, deliberately lead his hearers to believe what he knew was a lie. Quibbling about the parsing of words or a peculiar definition of sexual relations is a crime against his oath to "tell the whole truth."

Does this "rise to the level" of impeachment? You bet, if for no reason other than the eleven-month scandal, which he alone forced us to endure. Clinton is a national embarrassment, at home and abroad.

Clinton's affair with the intern was not a private matter. He himself made it very public by doing it on public property, and by exploiting his tax-salaried staff into lying for him before the grand jury, on television, and in the concealment of his trysts and gifts.

The majority of the American people knew it was wrong for President Jimmy Carter and the U.S. Senate to give away our canal in Panama, and Republicans made it their litmus test. America had paid for this most expensive piece of real estate four times: we paid Panama for sovereignty "in perpetuity," we bought the Zone again from Columbia, we paid the French Canal Company for its assets, and we bought the deeds from the private property owners, and then we built the Canal with our ingenuity and investment.

The giveaway of our Canal was the most significant action of the Jimmy Carter Presidency. Why would

any Republican Senator help him to reach a two-thirds majority in the Senate to consummate the deal with the drug-smuggling Communist Omar Torrijos, the dictator of a little country that usually changed its rulers through violence?

Cui bono? Who profits? The ten largest U.S. banks had outstanding claims in Panama of almost $3 billion, and the only way they could call their loans was if the bankrupt Torrijos were given the tolls from the Canal. Incidentally, they were some of the same New York banking interests that recently finagled the scandalous bailouts of corrupt foreign dictators and the International Monetary Fund, again imposing the costs on the U.S. taxpayers.

Twenty years later, we are approaching the fateful moment when the clock will strike noon on December 31, 1999, and we pull out of the Canal Zone forever, turning over to the Panamanians $32 billion worth of bases and equipment paid for by the American taxpayers. All the arguments advanced 20 years ago by the treaty giveaway advocates have been proven false, and all the dire predictions of those who voted No have come true.

Now we find that, as the United States is pulling out, Communist China is moving in. China has negotiated long leases to occupy a strategic port at both ends of the Panama Canal: Cristobal Port on the Atlantic and Balboa Port on the Pacific.

The U.S. Senate ratified the Panama treaty in 1978 by a one-vote margin. Within two years, angry voters defeated two dozen Senators who voted for the treaty and induced eight more to retire.

In 1980, the Panama Canal issue helped Ronald Reagan to be elected President and Republicans to win their surprise majority in the U.S. Senate.

We are now hearing the desperate voices of those who want to avoid going on record about impeachment. Some say the House shouldn't vote for impeachment unless it is sure the Senate will convict.

That's bad advice. Impeachment is the high-stakes business of the current House, and Members should step up to the plate and vote regardless of whether the Senate fumbles later. Voters with long memories will hold Members responsible for their decisions.

Then, when the new Congress convenes in January, it should start investigating the areas that Ken Starr never reached, such as the quid pro quos that Clinton gave to China in return for illegal campaign contributions.