



Jason Stevenson is the strategic communications manager at the ACLU of Utah.

Good evening.

For 99 years the ACLU has followed the watchword that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

In 2016, we told Candidate Trump that if he acted on any of his unconstitutional campaign promises, we would see him in court. And we did – filing 140 lawsuits and 100 other legal actions in the last three years.

But because the ACLU is a nonpartisan organization, we also sued the Obama administration dozens of times over immigration detention, drone policies, and the secret surveillance of Americans.

In fact, the ACLU has challenged and annoyed every president since William G. Harding.

But throughout our history, the ACLU has supported the impeachment of our president only twice.

The first time was in 1973 when we, and many others, concluded that President Richard Nixon had violated the civil liberties of the people of the United States and the rule of law.

And second time was just last week when a majority of the ACLU’s National Board of Directors decided that President Trump **has committed impeachable offenses and violated his oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.**

At the ACLU, we don’t call for impeachment lightly.

In fact, none of us do.

That is why we are here on a cold night in the middle of December.

Impeachment of a President is different.

It is different because the stakes are higher due to the extraordinary power given to the President.

This alone is a reason to advance the impeachment process conservatively.

It is a reminder to gather all the facts, to interview witnesses, and to find out what really happened.

But it is also a reason — once the evidence is clear, as it is today — to act boldly and with the knowledge that the future is watching.

At the ACLU, we believe that President Trump's continuation in office poses a grave and imminent threat to civil liberties, and that he will continue to pursue illegal means

to influence the 2020 election and to impede lawful efforts to reveal any such wrongdoing.

The two articles of impeachment approved by the House Judiciary Committee last week spell out why this is so serious, and why any President who had taken the same actions would pose a threat to our civil liberties and the Constitution.

The first charge is “Abuse of power” – which means abusing the power and authority of the office of the President.

We believe that the President abused the powers of the executive office to **further his own personal and political interests** and not the interests of the nation, which resulted in damage to the national security of the United States and **undermined the integrity of our democratic process and elections**. With a presidential election less than a year away, this charge should set off alarm bells that our democratic principles are under threat.

The second charge is “Obstruction of Congress.”

We believe that the President **improperly invoked executive immunity** by instructing government officials and agencies to refuse to testify or produce documents, resulting in the obstruction of a Congressional investigation. When the institutions and rules that have safeguarded our nation **are being defied every day**, we should worry about what is happening in the shadows.

In fact, this impeachment process isn’t just about President Trump, or Democrats or Republicans, or Independents.

This is about the office of the President, **and the system of checks and balances wisely placed in the Constitution hundreds of years ago**—including the route of impeachment—to protect our republic from threats from all sides—and from within. This is about that idea—which can seem **dangerously vulnerable on some days**—that no one is above the law... including the President.

That is why we are standing here tonight.

Because as dark and cold as it is, and as much as we might want to be someplace warmer, we are here tonight **because we cannot stand idly by while the rule of law is under threat**.

We cannot **shrug our shoulders** and say, “Well, what’s happening is just too bad,” and **change the channel** to something more lighthearted.

We cannot do these things **because some day, in the future**, we will talk about these days, and we will say, **“This was when we stood for something that mattered.”**

Some of you did this in 1973. Some of you are back here in 2019. And we are all going to remember these days.