

Trump's defense attorneys quit ahead of impeachment trial

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Washington, January 31 (RHC)-- Former U.S. President Donald Trump abruptly parted ways with lawyers working on his defence for his Senate impeachment trial, throwing the former president's legal strategy into disarray, news reports said.

Butch Bowers and Deborah Barberi, two South Carolina lawyers, are no longer on Trump's team in a move described a "mutual decision," sources told The Associated Press and Reuters news agencies. Three other lawyers associated with the team -- Josh Howard of North Carolina and Johnny Gasser and Greg Harris of South Carolina -- also split with Trump, another source was quoted as saying.

A third source said Trump had differences with Bowers over strategy ahead of the trial. The former president still contends that he was the victim of mass voter fraud in the November 3 election won by

President Joe Biden.

The shake-up leaves Trump's defence team in turmoil as he prepares for a trial starting on February 9th to consider an article of impeachment passed by the House of Representatives charging Trump with inciting the January 6th storming of the U.S. Capitol by his followers.

It was unclear who would now represent the former president at the trial. His White House lawyers at his first impeachment trial last year, Pat Cipollone and Patrick Philbin, are not expected to be a part of the proceedings. Forty-five Senate Republicans backed a failed effort last Tuesday to halt Trump's impeachment trial, in a show of party unity that some cited as a clear sign he will not be convicted of inciting insurrection at the Capitol.

"The Democrats' efforts to impeach a president who has already left office is totally unconstitutional and so bad for our country," said Trump adviser Jason Miller. "In fact, 45 senators have already voted that it is unconstitutional. We have done much work, but have not made a final decision on our legal team, which will be made shortly," Miller said.

Clyde Wilcox, a professor of government at Georgetown University, said it was unlikely Trump would be convicted because that would take two-thirds of the Senate. "So as long as he really doesn't screw it up he's going to be acquitted," Wilcox told reporters.

"His best defence is the argument he began making last week, that he would go and start a Patriot Party. That threat is enough to keep many of the Republican senators in line. He is also threatening to show up and defend himself. That would be quite a circus, but it would also be a disaster."

Trump has struggled to find lawyers willing to defend him after becoming the first president in history to be impeached twice. After numerous lawyers who defended him previously declined to take on the case, Trump was introduced to Bowers by one of his closest allies in the Senate, South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham.

Bowers, a familiar figure in Republican legal circles, had years of experience representing elected officials and political candidates, including then-South Carolina governor Mark Sanford against a failed impeachment effort that morphed into an ethics probe. Bowers and Barbier did not immediately return messages seeking comment Saturday evening.

Republicans and Trump aides have made clear they intend to make a simple argument: Trump's trial is unconstitutional because he is no longer in office. While Republicans in Washington seemed eager to part ways with Trump after the deadly events of January 6th, they have since eased off of their criticism, weary of angering the former president's loyal voter base.

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