Second verse same as the first. A clear rhetorical narrative is being repeated—one bound to frustrate many and one that at least in the short term may not lead to the truth.

On Tuesday September 24, President Donald Trump authorized release of the transcript of his conversation with Ukraine’s President Zelensky. Despite the fact that the transcript revealed no explicit quid pro quo, it did show that Trump asked Ukraine’s leader to investigate Joe Biden, a Democratic candidate in 2020. As inappropriate and dangerous as that may be, this probably will not lead to Republican outrage or serious consequences for Trump.

The pattern is clear and recurring: we now will get buried in a tedious, technical and partisan debate about whether there is anything illegal or
jeopardizes national security in what Trump said in the conversation, especially since there may be no explicit quid pro quo. Each side will play the same role they have in past accusations of presidential wrongdoing.

We've seen this rhetorical narrative before. When accused of wrongdoing, President Trump first denies what transpired. Then he declares there is nothing wrong with what he said. Finally he reduces the accusation to being an additional example of how the Democrats who resent his being elected and want to re-litigate 2016 are undertaking another witch hunt. The President’s words then become verbatim talking points for Republican leaders.

Regardless of what political pundits and strategists speculate, does anyone really believe we have reached a tipping point? I am not convinced, but hope I am wrong. We have a President who has spent his lifetime successfully finding an escape hatch.

In addition and as expected, on Tuesday House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in the wake of Donald Trump’s conversation with the Ukraine President, announced the start of an impeachment inquiry, claiming President Trump has broken the law and violated his oath of office.

It is hardly surprising that a key Republican member of the House Intelligence Committee, Chris Stewart, immediately responded by asking how Pelosi can conduct a fair investigation when she already has concluded that Trump is guilty. Then House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy declared that Pelosi’s impeachment decision is but another example of how Democrats from day one and before any evidence was unearthed were out to remove Trump from office.

Following release of the transcript of Trump’s Ukraine conversation on Wednesday September 25, Senator Lindsey Graham followed suit: To
impeach a president over a phone call like this, said Graham, "would be insane".

And so the predictable rhetorical pattern again is being repeated, making me worry that all of this will not produce consequences for President Trump and will not result in him being held accountable. It will be a political food fight. The problem is that most people now view congress as incapable of bipartisan, impartial proceedings. Thursday’s (September 26) questioning of acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire lends additional credence to this problem.

My fear is that this means we may not be able to get to the truth of the matter. At the end of the day, therefore, the ballot box may be the ultimate and only check and balance—and the best mechanism for preserving the rule of law and the effective functioning of our sacred constitutional system of government..

Richard Cherwitz is Ernest A. Sharpe Centennial Professor Emeritus, Moody College of Communication University of Texas. He is founding director, Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium