Adam Schiff Delivers Powerful Speech

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On January 22, House impeachment manager Rep. Adam Schiff delivered a powerful opening presentation at the Senate trial of President Donald Trump. According to some, the speech was a tour de force—one that rhetorical critics will examine closely for years to come and portions of which might be used productively by public speaking teachers.

His arguments were deftly adapted to multiple audiences, including members of the Senate, Americans and history. The speech blended together a rigorously evidenced and chronologically ordered narrative, with frequent internal summaries followed by succinctly phrased overarching themes.
Schiff effectively invoked references to our nation's origin—all of which paralleled what is transpiring today with the behavior and motives of the 45th President of the U.S. Moreover, he delineated common sense and easy to digest constitutional principles enabling the audience to understand the case for the President being removed from office.

Finally, each section of the speech ended with carefully crafted and sincerely asked rhetorical questions, each designed to challenge the audience, imploring Americans and the Senate that they have no choice but to support conviction less our democracy be threatened and our future placed in danger.

Obviously, it is not yet known if Schiff’s speech will make a difference. Nevertheless, in my nonpartisan opinion as a scholar of communication for over 40 years, it offers an excellent example of how rhetorical principles can be used effectively in a speech addressing a highly complicated and controversial topic. As an advocate for impeachment and conviction, my hope is that it will serve as an illustration of how discourse has the capacity to create cognitive dissonance, perhaps resulting in at least a few senators rethinking their partisan views about the President and beliefs about whether witnesses should testify.

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