

THE BALTIMORE SUN

OPINION

John Bolton can tell the truth in a book.

He should be able to do it before lawmakers as well

COMMENTARY

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FOR THE BALTIMORE SUN |
MARCH 9, 2020 | 6:00 AM



Former National Security Adviser John Bolton speaks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in September in Washington, D.C.(Win McNamee/Getty Images North America/TNS)

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John Bolton might know the truth, but he'll have to answer for his silence to Congress.

One would think that given Mr. Bolton's humble upbringing as a Baltimore native from a working class neighborhood, he'd feel empathy for those who oppose a president hostile to his own city. As a teenager, Mr. Bolton received a merit scholarship to the prestigious McDonogh School, a Baltimore County institution famous for its academic rigor and emphasis on integrity. The school's honor code reads as follows:

"I will not lie, cheat, or steal. I will respect the rights and well-being of myself and others."

Had Mr. Trump's former national security adviser testified in front of the House when initially called, instead of keeping silent, waiting for a didn't-happen Republican Senate subpoena, and banking on a multi-million dollar book deal, then perhaps he could have lived up to the latter half of this honor code.

An excerpt from Mr. Bolton's upcoming book was leaked in the New York Times. Reportedly, there are at least a dozen pages on Mr. Trump's Ukraine involvement. Mr. Bolton's book claims in its title that he was "In the Room Where it Happened." More leaks are expected to come. The reported book text confirms that there was indeed a "quid pro quo" by Mr. Trump, which Mr. Bolton witnessed, of Ukrainian aid in exchange for Mr. Biden investigation announcements.

It wouldn't be unreasonable to think that, given his Baltimore roots, Mr. Bolton would have compassion for those at the mercy of dishonest and powerful special interests. His father was a firefighter, who by his life taught selflessness.

It is inexplicable that Mr. Bolton, a self described “Americanist ” (as he defined it, someone who puts America first), was willing to talk with The Senate instead of testifying in front of The House Intelligence Committee and complying with his subpoena. It comes off as pure partisanship, and should be known as such. Partisanship should never be a deciding factor when testimony vital to the preservation of American democracy hangs in the balance. We live under a government, including the House and Senate, elected by people; regardless of which side wins each.

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Mr. Bolton had and still has the chance to testify before the House. He can come clean and take a moral stance against abuse of power and the corruption of the presidency. He has a chance to provide a fair warning that if the details of President Trump’s actions are not exposed, he will likely once again attempt to interfere with the 2020 elections and make demands for anything else he wants.

But Mr. Bolton waited until after the House impeachment inquiry’s conclusion to announce that he was willing to testify during the Senate trial — something which, the political sophisticate that he is, he knew was not likely to happen. He wants us to glean it all in his new book, yet the White House is now fighting its distribution on “national security” and “classification” grounds — which all too often means simply to protect the subject of exposure from political embarrassment for wrongdoing. The book was supposed to be released this month but pushed back because of the continued “review” by the White House.

Ultimately, Mr. Bolton has free speech and, unlike Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, does not have a job now from which he can be fired. Mr. Bolton can do the right thing.

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Mr. Bolton’s book is now set to be released in May. That is, if the White House does not manage to block its release entirely. That is another few month with no answers, and another few months without a sworn testimony that Mr. Bolton owes his country. The written pages are not the amplification in questions and answers under oath that define the truth.

Mr. Bolton should be thanked for deciding to say something about the corruption going on in this country, but he is no patriot. Seventeen patriotic witnesses, including the recently fired Lt. Col. Vindman, defied Mr. Trump and White House counsel's edict not to testify — a book without testimony is naked opportunism.

Another Baltimore native, the late Rep. Elijah Cummings, said it best: “When we're dancing with the angels, the question will be asked, What did we do to make sure we kept our democracy intact?”

There is no question that Mr. Bolton testifying and doing the right thing to protect and uphold his nation's democracy would make his community and his country proud. Baltimore's John Bolton still has the chance to do the right thing by testifying, and it should not matter which party happens to control the House or Senate.

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