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AMBASSADOR SONDLAND DIDN'T SAY THAT!

By Steve Bakke  December 3, 2019



Steve Chapman's Opinion Exchange article on 11-26-19, "A middle-path alternative to impeachment," argued the House "hearings made clear the president's conduct was over the line." He wrote: ".....there can be no serious doubt that Trump withheld U.S. military aid to try to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to help him smear Biden and the Democratic Party. His own appointees, notably Ambassador Gordon Sondland, say it happened."

It was important for Chapman to include a statement about Sondland because many of the others were relying on things he said to express their own representations or opinions. Sondland was the only witness who had spoken to directly to the president and asked him clarifying questions about the issue of "quid-pro-quo."

In fact, Sondland's testimony was far different than Chapman represented. My reading of the final testimony is that Sondland was sure quid-pro-quo was present only relative to gaining a visit to the Oval Office. Sondland stated he had no direct knowledge that Trump was withholding military aid to force a smear campaign on Biden. In fact, Sondland testified he had directly asked that of the president, who replied directly there was no quid-pro-quo. He admitted he was expressing only a presumption when previously stating his opinion that military aid was withheld pending an investigation of Biden.

I'm not trying to convince anyone that Sondland's testimony was precisely correct. Rather, I just want to point out that Steve Chapman's representation of Sondland's testimony was very flawed, and the StarTribune should be concerned with that.