Twitter Thread by Darren Samuelsohn

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Mitch McConnell is telling GOP senators their decision on a Trump impeachment trial conviction is a 'vote of conscience' https://t.co/tzuXEyD8ap by @tomlobianco ($) in @Politicsinsider

"His message to me was this would clearly be a vote of conscience," Sen. Kevin Cramer, a North Dakota Republican, told @Politicsinsider "He's always been respectful of members that way."

Cramer, a former House Republican & early supporter of Trump who stuck w/ him through his 1 term in office, said that he doesn't want to vote to convict Trump. But he said he might be open to voting in favor of barring Trump from serving in office again after last week's attack.

Such a vote to permanently end Trump's federal government career requires just a simple majority but would only happen should two-thirds of the Senate vote to convict Trump. That has never before occurred to a president in more than 230 years of US history.

The domestic attack on the Capitol has lawmakers from both parties rattled ahead of Biden's inauguration, where about 20,000 National Guard troops have set up camp in and around the nation's seat of legislative power.

"This is the representative republic at work and it was such an assault, it was an assault on that very day's work," Cramer said in the interview on Thursday.

But the senator acknowledged that Republicans like him are also worried about backlash from Trump and his supporters as the impeachment trial approaches. Some GOP lawmakers have faced death threats from Trump supporters and they've purchased body armor for protection.

"A conviction of Trump may mean he doesn't run again, but it doesn't mean he gives up without a fight," Cramer said. "All my pro-Trump Republican friends want to take my head off for not blowing up the Constitution."

McConnell's strategy of telling Rs like Cramer they have the freedom to convict Trump has prompted all manner of speculation about what the GOP Senate leader is doing. Some sources think he's delivering a warning shot to Trump that Republicans are finished with him in politics.

"They're free, like a bird," a GOP source familiar with McConnell's thinking told Insider. "They don't want him running again. That's what McConnell is trying to figure out how to do."

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