Nancy Pelosi and her House colleagues have been careful to refrain from launching an impeachment move against President Trump until they have a solid base of arguments and support. They have been criticized by more vocal detractors of President Trump for moving so slowly.

The current environment of caution reminds me of another era, in the early 1970s, when members of the U.S. House of Representatives were similarly cautious about proceeding with impeachment against President Richard Nixon.

My family was Republican for generations. In Armstrong County, Pennsylvania, where my family lived and farmed, the Republican Party opposed the extension of slavery into the new territories of the United States and in the 1860 election voted overwhelmingly for Abraham Lincoln. My great-grandfather and his brother served in the Union Army in the Civil War.

When I first became politically active, my natural bent was to start with the Republican Party. I soon came to realize that, in the era of Richard Nixon, it was no longer the party of Lincoln. I was concerned at how our country had become mired in the Vietnam War, and about issues of honesty and fair play with the nation’s Republican political leadership. News of falsifying casualty counts in Vietnam, dirty tricks against political opponents, a White House “enemies list,” divisive politics and the potentially illegal activities involved in the Watergate burglary were distressing reflections on the state of the Republican Party.

A Bay Area Republican congressman, Pete McCloskey, made an unusual challenge to the sitting president of his own party, running in 1972 against Nixon in the Republican presidential primaries. I supported McCloskey, even running myself for the Los Angeles County Republican Central Committee to help take party leadership back to a more ethical and moderate path.

As a college sophomore with an interest in government and politics, in the summer of 1973 I decided to do an internship in the House of Representatives in Washington, and asked Pete McCloskey if I could work in his office. He had a full complement of interns for the summer, so he suggested I read a new book, O Congress, by his colleague Don Riegle. Riegle was a second-year congressman from Flint, Michigan, elected as a Republican, and had written a frank diary of his first year in the House. I read the book, wrote Congressman Riegle, and he signed me on as an intern for the coming summer.

By the time I arrived in Washington, Riegle felt he could no longer identify with the Republican Party and had switched parties to become a Democrat. As a student journalist, I was put to work for his press secretary, keeping track of the congressman’s press coverage in Michigan. It was a wonderful summer, learning first-hand the workings of the legislative branch of government.

One day, the congressman’s staff director called several of us interns into his office. He told us that the move to impeach President Nixon was gathering steam, but members of the House did not want to move forward in any public way, or even have it be known that they were working on this issue until evidence of impeachable activities had been found, and support was sufficient. None of them wanted to put the country through a specious impeachment process or pay the price in the polls or at future elections of being associated with an unsuccessful presidential impeachment effort.

He told us that to fly under the radar, a group of members had decided to create a working group of their interns to begin to prepare the material for impeachment. Since we weren’t staff members and weren’t paid from their funds, this group would be a completely unofficial effort to gather information and help to formulate the arguments for impeachment. We were told to keep our work strictly confidential.

The group included interns from the offices of Bella Abzug, Robert Drinan, Pete McCloskey, Don Riegle and several others. Each of us was assigned to write a research paper on an aspect of impeachment. Since I was interested in a law career, my topic was “British Common Law Precedents for Presidential Impeachment Without Criminal Charges.” I spent many hours in the Library of Congress doing my research.

Our intern group met throughout the summer, reported on our research and discussed it, and turned in our papers to the group of congressional staff quietly monitoring our progress. We also shared a pass to attend the Watergate hearings being held by the Senate Judiciary Committee, so we were able to stand on our tip-toes at the back of the hearing room, watching Sam Ervin conduct one of the great investigations in American history.

So the current environment of caution about moving too quickly rings true with what I recall from 1973. But it’s well to remember that we never know what may be going on behind the scenes!