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Intelligence panel has deal to hear whistleblower's testimony

By **Felicia Sonmez** and **Mike DeBonis**

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House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam B. Schiff said Sunday that his panel has reached an agreement to secure testimony from the anonymous whistleblower whose detailed complaint launched an impeachment investigation into President Trump.

The announcement from Schiff came on the same day that Tom Bossert, a former Trump homeland security adviser, delivered a rebuke of the president, saying in an interview on ABC's "This Week" that he was "deeply disturbed" by the implications of Trump's recently reported actions.

Those comments come as members of Congress return to their districts for a two-week recess, during which they will either have to make the case for Trump's impeachment or defend him to voters amid mounting questions about his conduct.

impeachment inquiry



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In appearances over the weekend, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) offered a preview of the Democratic message, casting the impeachment inquiry as a somber task that she chose to endorse only as a last resort.

“I have handled this with great care, with great moderation, with great attention to what we knew was a fact or what was an allegation,” Pelosi said Saturday at the Texas Tribune Festival in Austin. “This is very bad news for our country, because if it is as it seems to be, our president engaged in something that is so far beyond what our founders had in mind.”

While privately favoring a rapid probe confined to the Ukraine allegations, Pelosi said Saturday that the investigation would last “as long as the Intelligence Committee follows the facts.”

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On a conference call with House Democrats on Sunday afternoon, Pelosi told her colleagues that public sentiment — something she had frequently cited as an obstacle to pursuing impeachment — had begun to swing around.

“The polls have changed drastically about this,” she said, urging a careful approach, according to notes taken by a person on the call: “Our tone must be prayerful, respectful, solemn, worthy of the Constitution.”

In an interview broadcast Sunday on CBS’s “60 Minutes,” Pelosi summarized her message to Trump and his aides: “Speak the truth, and let us work together to have this be a unifying experience, not a dividing one for our country. Don’t make this any worse than it already is.”

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In an appearance on ABC News’s “This Week,” Schiff (D-Calif.) echoed Pelosi’s message. He also said he expected the Intelligence Committee to hear from the whistleblower “very soon” pending a security clearance from acting director of national intelligence Joseph Maguire.

“We’ll get the unfiltered testimony of that whistleblower,” Schiff said, noting that Maguire said in a hearing Thursday that he would allow the whistleblower to testify privately without constraints.

One of the whistleblower’s attorneys, Mark Zaid, said in a statement that bipartisan negotiations in both chambers are ongoing “and we understand and agree that protecting the whistleblower’s identity is paramount.” He added that no date or time for the testimony has been set.

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Andrew P. Bakaj, another lawyer representing the whistleblower, sent a letter Saturday to Maguire expressing fears for his client’s safety, citing remarks Trump made Wednesday calling the whistleblower “close to a spy” and alluding to the death penalty.

“Unfortunately, we expect this situation to worsen, and to become even more dangerous for our client and any other whistleblowers, as Congress seeks to investigate this matter,” Bakaj wrote.

In a separate letter, Bakaj urged the leaders of the congressional intelligence committees to “speak out in favor of whistleblower protection and reiterate that this is a protected system where retaliation is not permitted, whether direct or implied.”

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Most Republican lawmakers and White House aides, meanwhile, continued to voice support for the president, even as they faced particularly tough grilling by hosts on the morning news shows over their efforts to discredit the unidentified whistleblower and keep the focus on former vice president Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden.

Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) pointed to an initial finding by the intelligence community inspector general stating that while the complaint was credible, the whistleblower had an “arguable political bias.”

“He had no firsthand knowledge. . . . And, second, he has a political bias,” Jordan said on CNN’s “State of the Union.” “That should tell us something about this guy who came forward with this claim.”

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Host Jake Tapper repeatedly pushed back against Jordan's assertions. "There is no evidence of that," he said in response to Jordan's claim of political bias, noting that the language used by the inspector general in describing the whistleblower "could mean that he interned for John McCain 20 years ago. We have no idea what it means."

White House senior adviser Stephen Miller went even further in an at-times heated interview on "Fox News Sunday."

Miller dodged several questions from host Chris Wallace about allegations surrounding the president's actions, such as Trump's decision to use not the federal government but rather his personal attorney, Rudolph W. Giuliani, to obtain information on the Bidens' activities in Ukraine.

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He also declined to answer when asked by Wallace to outline how, in his view, the Bidens broke any laws. And he disputed the use of the word “whistleblower” to describe the person who sounded the alarm about Trump’s actions, arguing that the complaint was a “partisan hit job” by a “deep-state operative” — even though Maguire said in congressional testimony last week that he thinks the whistleblower “is operating in good faith and has followed the law.”

As both sides sparred, Trump largely stayed out of public view. The president spent the weekend playing golf at his club in Sterling, Va., and occasionally attacking Democrats and the news media online. On Sunday morning, he sent more than 20 tweets and retweets slamming Fox News Channel host Ed Henry’s performance during a segment with conservative commentator Mark Levin.

Later Sunday, Trump tweeted that he wants Schiff “questioned at the highest level for Fraud & Treason” for his remarks at last week’s hearing where Maguire testified. And Trump demanded to meet the whistleblower as well as the person’s sources.

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“In addition, I want to meet not only my accuser, who presented SECOND & THIRD HAND INFORMATION, but also the person who illegally gave this information, which was largely incorrect, to the ‘Whistleblower,’ ” Trump tweeted. “Was this person SPYING on the U.S. President? Big Consequences!”

House Democrats last week began an impeachment inquiry into Trump’s actions after the release of the whistleblower complaint as well as a rough transcript of a July phone call in which Trump repeatedly urged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate Biden, who is leading in polls for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination.

Hunter Biden served for nearly five years on the board of Burisma, Ukraine’s largest private gas company, whose owner came under scrutiny by Ukrainian prosecutors for possible abuse of power and unlawful enrichment. The former vice president’s son was not accused of any wrongdoing in the investigation.

As vice president, Biden pressured Ukraine to fire the top prosecutor, Viktor Shokin, who Biden and other Western officials said was not sufficiently pursuing corruption cases. At the time, the investigation into Burisma was dormant, according to former Ukrainian and U.S. officials.

Trump’s handling of the matter appears to have alarmed voters. An ABC News-Ipsos poll released Sunday showed that 63 percent of adults say it is a serious problem that Trump pushed Zelensky to look at Hunter Biden.

However, less than half of the public, 43 percent, said Trump’s action was “very serious.” And just about half of Americans said they are “not surprised at all” to hear of Trump’s actions.

Among those expressing concern Sunday was Bossert, a rare official with ties to Trump to take on the president.

Bossert said he was “deeply disturbed” by the implications of Trump’s call to Zelensky and strongly criticized the president for seemingly furthering an unfounded theory that cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike played a role in shielding emails sent by Trump’s 2016 Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, and circulating allegations of Russian hacking.

The U.S. intelligence community has concluded that the Russians did hack Democratic sources in an effort to swing the election to Trump.

“That conspiracy theory has got to go,” Bossert said on ABC News’s “This Week,” explaining that Trump was motivated to spread the “completely debunked” theory because he had “not gotten his pound of flesh yet” over accusations that he had Russian help in winning the 2016 election. “They have to stop with that. It cannot continue to be repeated in our discourse. . . . If he continues to focus on that white whale, it’s going to bring him down.”

But Bossert said he was not convinced that Trump had leveraged U.S. aid to Ukraine for political dirt, noting that the president had other potential legitimate reasons to withhold the aid.

Both sides continued to dig in as scrutiny of Trump intensified.

Democrats argued that the documents the Trump administration released last week reveal that the president was misusing his office.

Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) said the president’s call clearly showed an abuse of power that justified impeachment proceedings. In an appearance on “State of the Union,” he referred to “The Godfather,” saying Trump used a “high-pressure tactic” by asking for an investigation of the Bidens.

“It was an offer that the Ukrainian president could not refuse,” Jeffries said.

Republicans, meanwhile, escalated their attacks on the whistleblower and dismissed the individual's claims as invalid.

"You can't get a parking ticket conviction based on hearsay," Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) said Sunday in an interview on CBS's "Face the Nation." "Donald Trump is still an American. Every American deserves to confront their accuser. So this is a sham as far as I'm concerned."

In a combative appearance on "This Week," Giuliani was asked at one point whether he would cooperate with the House Intelligence Committee's probe. Giuliani initially said he would not unless its leadership changed, calling Schiff "illegitimate" and accusing him of having "prejudged the case."

But Giuliani then backtracked and said he would "consider it," based on the direction of Trump. "If he decides that he wants me to testify, of course I'll testify," he said.

Schiff disputed Giuliani's characterization of his role, telling host George Stephanopoulos: "My role here is to do the investigation, to make sure the facts come out. What we have seen already is damning."

Giuliani was somewhat more subdued in a separate appearance on Fox News Channel's "Sunday Morning Futures," during which host Maria Bartiromo pressed him on criticism from some Republicans that his frequent television appearances were not helping the president.

"What am I supposed to do, keep silent?" Giuliani asked.

Shane Harris contributed to this report.

