

Schiff: Panel will hear from whistleblower

Deserve to meet accuser, his sources, Trump tweets

by Compiled by Democrat-Gazette staff from wire reports | September 30, 2019 at 7:15 a.m.

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WASHINGTON -- House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff said Sunday that he expects the whistleblower at the heart of impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump to testify "very soon."

"All that needs to be done, at this point, is to make sure that the attorneys that represent the whistleblower get the clearances that they need to be able to accompany the whistleblower to testimony," said Schiff, D-Calif., "and that we figure out the logistics to make sure that we protect the identity of the whistleblower."

As Democrats and the director of national intelligence worked out key arrangements, Trump's allies took part in a surge of second-guessing and conspiracy theorizing across the Sunday talk shows. One former adviser urged Trump to confront the crisis at hand and get past his anger over the probe of Russian election interference.

"I honestly believe this president has not gotten his pound of flesh yet from past grievances on the 2016 investigation," said Tom Bossert, Trump's former homeland security adviser. "If he continues to focus on that white whale," Bossert added, "it's going to bring him down."

The investigation in Ukraine produced what the Russian probe did not: formal House impeachment proceedings based on the president's own words and actions.

The White House last week released a nonverbatim memorandum of Trump's July 25 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, as well as the whistleblower's complaint alleging the U.S. president pressured his counterpart to investigate the family of former Vice President Joe Biden, who is seeking the Democratic nomination to challenge Trump's re-election next year.

In a series of tweets Sunday night, Trump said he deserved to meet "my accuser" as well as whoever provided the whistleblower with what the president called "largely incorrect" information. He also accused Democrats of "doing great harm to our Country" in an effort to destabilize the nation and the 2020 election.

Trump has sought to implicate Biden and his son Hunter Biden in the kind of corruption that has long plagued Ukraine. Hunter Biden served on the board of a Ukrainian gas company at the same time his father was leading the Obama administration's diplomatic dealings with Kiev. There has been no evidence of wrongdoing by either of the Bidens.

The House forged ahead, with Schiff's committee leading the investigation. Democrats are planning a rapid start to their push for impeachment, with hearings and depositions starting this week. Many Democrats are pushing for a vote on articles of impeachment before the end of the year, mindful of the looming 2020 elections.

'COULD NOT REFUSE'

On a conference call later Sunday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi D-Calif., who was traveling in Texas, urged Democrats to proceed "not with negative attitudes towards [Trump], but a positive attitude towards our responsibility," according to an aide on the call who requested anonymity to share the private conversation. She also urged the caucus to be "somber" and noted that polling on impeachment has changed "drastically."

On the call, Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries of New York urged the caucus to talk about impeachment by repeating the words "betrayal, abuse of power, national security." At the same time, the Democrats' campaign arm was mobilizing to support the candidates, according to a person on the call who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the details.

In an appearance on CNN's State of the Union, Jeffries invoked a line from 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

In an interview Sunday on CBS' 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."

In an appearance on ABC News's This Week, Schiff 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.

GOP DEFENDERS

Republicans offered a televised array of strategies to a president who spent the day at his golf club in Virginia and prefers to handle his own communications.

Stephen Miller, the president's senior policy adviser, called the whole inquiry a "partisan hit job" orchestrated by "a deep state operative" who is also "a saboteur."

"The president of the United States is the whistleblower," Miller said.

And House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California said Trump had done nothing impeachable.

"Why would we move forward with impeachment? There's not something that you have to defend here," McCarthy said.

Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the No. 2 Republican in the House, repeatedly changed the subject Sunday when Chuck Todd, the moderator of NBC's Meet the Press, pressed him on whether he believed a memo of the Ukraine call merited further investigation.

"Well, they've been investigating President Trump for two years, making way for baseless allegations," Scalise finally said. "They're investigating everything."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., suggested that Trump appoint a special prosecutor to look into Biden's role in the firing of a former prosecutor in Ukraine, and said he had no problem with the president's call.

"I'm openly telling everybody in the country I have the president's back because I think this is a setup," he said on CBS' Face the Nation.

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 State of the Union. "That should tell us something about this guy who came forward with this claim."

State of the Union 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."

Miller went even further in an at-times heated interview on Fox News Sunday.

He 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 Rudy Giuliani to obtain information on the Bidens' activities in Ukraine.

Giuliani, who has been encouraging Ukraine to investigate both Biden and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, promoted a debunked conspiracy theory, insisting that Ukraine had spread disinformation during the 2016 election.

Bossert advised that Trump drop that defense

"I am deeply frustrated with what he and the legal team is doing and repeating that debunked theory to the president. It sticks in his mind when he hears it over and over again," said Bossert, who also was an adviser to President George W. Bush. "That conspiracy theory has got to go, they have to stop with that, it cannot continue to be repeated."

Giuliani not only repeated it but also brandished what he said were affidavits that support them and claimed that Trump "was framed by the Democrats."

Schiff said in one interview that his committee intends to subpoena Giuliani for documents and may eventually want to hear from Giuliani directly. In a separate TV appearance, Giuliani said he would not cooperate with Schiff, but then acknowledged he would do what Trump tells him. The White House did not provide an official response on whether the president would allow Giuliani to cooperate.

"If they're going to obstruct," Schiff warned, "then they're going to increase the likelihood that Congress may feel it necessary to move forward with an article on obstruction."

Two advisers to the Biden campaign sent a letter Sunday urging major news networks to stop booking Giuliani on their shows, accusing Trump's personal attorney of spreading "false, debunked conspiracy

theories" on behalf of the president. The letter added: "By giving him your air time, you are allowing him to introduce increasingly unhinged, unfounded and desperate lies into the national conversation."

Biden advisers Anita Dunn and Kate Bedingfield sent the letter to the presidents of ABC News, NBC News, CBS News, MSNBC, CNN and Fox News as well as executive producers and anchors of their news shows. The advisers also asked that if Giuliani continues to appear, the networks give equivalent time to a Biden campaign surrogate and admonished the networks for giving Giuliani time in the first place, calling it "a disservice to your audience and a disservice to journalism."

Information for this article was contributed by Laurie Kellman, Kevin Freking, Eric Tucker, Mary Clare Jalonick, Bill Barrow and Emily Swanson of The Associated Press; by Sheryl Gay Stolberg of The New York Times; and by Felicia Sonmez, Mike DeBonis, Scott Clement and Christopher Rowland of The Washington Post.