
US SENATE COMMITTEE TO QUESTION 20 IN RUSSIA PROBE

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The Senate Intelligence Committee has requested 20 individuals to be interviewed for the panel's probe of alleged Russian interference in last year's US election.

Richard Burr, the Republican chairman of the committee, declined to identify any of them, except for President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Burr and the top Democrat on the panel, Senator Mark Warner, said on Wednesday they would steer clear of politics in their probe.

Burr said: "Mark and I work hand in hand on this. ... We're partners to see that this is completed and that we have a product at the end of the day that we can, in bipartisanship, support."

The White House has said that Kushner, a senior adviser to Trump, has volunteered to answer questions about arranging meetings with the Russian ambassador and other officials.

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Burr served as a security adviser to Trump's campaign but said he has not coordinated with him on the scope of the committee's investigation.

Asked if he could promise to oversee an impartial probe, Burr responded: "Absolutely. I'll do something I've never done. I'll admit I voted for him [Trump]. ... But I've got a job in the US Senate and ... it overrides any personal beliefs that I have or loyalties that I might have."

Warner said he had seen no evidence the White House was interfering and would complain publicly if he did.

Trump's ex-campaign manager faces claims of Russia ties

Burr and Warner would not comment on a separate investigation by the House of Representatives, where the chairman of the intelligence committee, Trump ally Devin Nunes, has been under fire over his handling of the matter.

Many Democrats called for Nunes to recuse himself from the investigation after he met last week with an unidentified source at the White House complex to review classified material, which he says indicates that Trump associates' communications were captured in "incidental" surveillance of foreigners..

Before telling his committee colleagues, Nunes met with House Speaker Paul Ryan, and then Trump.

Trump has used Nunes' revelations to defend his claim that former president Barack Obama tapped phones at Trump Tower in New York, though Nunes and his committee's top Democrat, Adam Schiff of California, say there is no such evidence.

Ahead of Thursday's Senate hearing, Warner pledged to keep the investigation focused on the reason it was started.

"An outside foreign adversary effectively sought to hijack our most critical democratic process - the election of the president - and in the process decided to favor one candidate over another," Warner said.

"I can assure you, they didn't do it because it was in the vested interest of the American people."

"Russia's goal, Vladimir Putin's goal, is a weaker United States - weaker economically, weaker globally - and that should be a concern to all Americans, regardless of party affiliation."

Burr said the investigation's mission is to look at all activities Russia might have undertaken to alter or influence the election and to examine contacts any campaign had with Russian government officials that could have influenced the process.

Kaynak/Source: