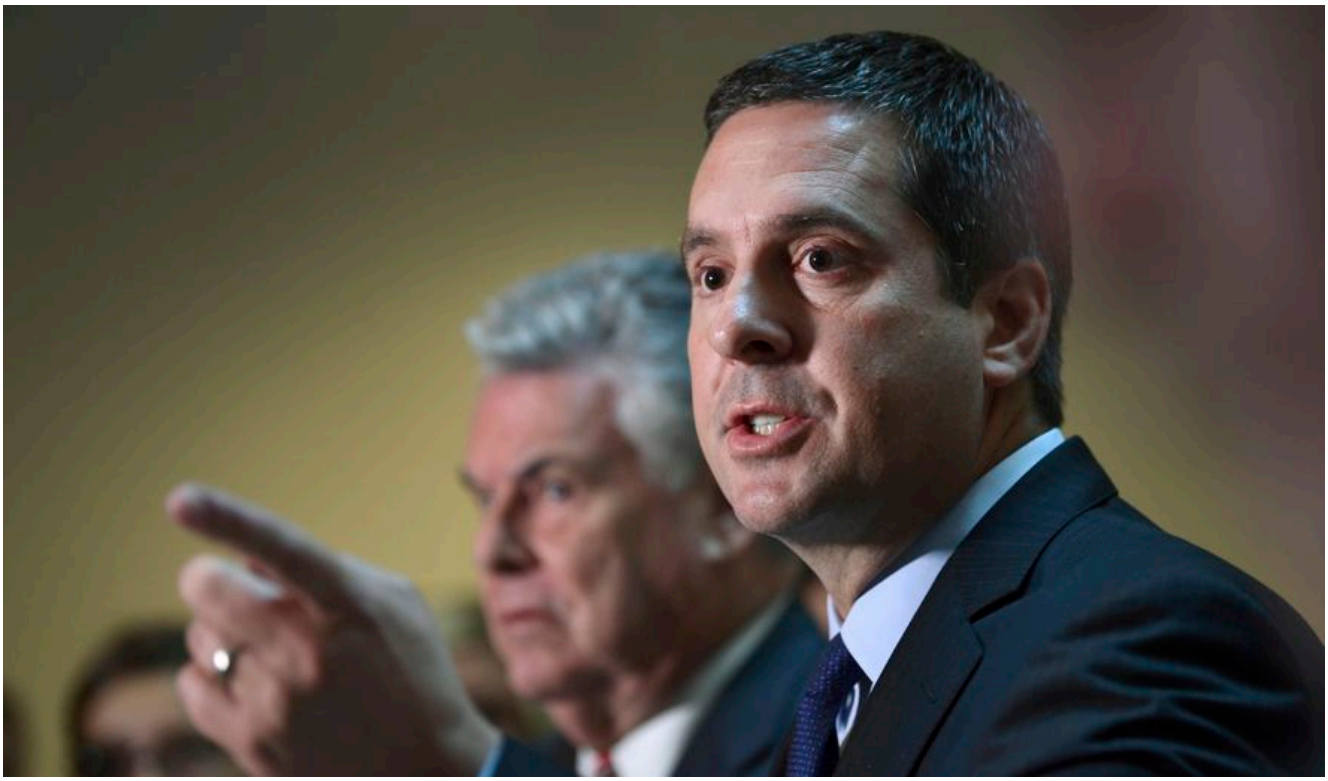
House expands Russia probe to FBI, Justice use of unconfirmed dossier to snare Trump



Rep. Devin Nunes (right), chairman of the House Permanent Select committee on intelligence, has widened the net in the panel's investigation into the use of the unconfirmed Russia dossier against Donald Trump. (Associated Press/File)

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence has expanded its 2016 election investigation from a starting point of Russian interference to an end-game that focuses on federal law enforcement and how it conducted a drive to snare President Trump and his people.

Committee Chairman Devin Nunes, California Republican, is accusing the Justice Department and the FBI of misleading him in "a pattern of behavior that can no longer be tolerated." He charges that Justice claimed it possesses no documents related to the infamous Trump dossier, then, under pressure, produced "numerous" such papers.

Republicans in the first half of 2018 are likely to wind down the starting-point inquiry into Russian hacking of Democrats and whether Trump aides helped.

Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the committee's top Democrat, already is protesting the likely move. He is pushing an extended list of witnesses he wants summoned by Republicans, who suspect Mr. Schiff would like to see the probe stay active into November's midterm elections and beyond.

Democrats, including Mr. Schiff, have conceded in recent weeks that their hope of finding an extensive Russia–Trumpconspiracy to jointly attack former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has fallen short at this point.

What could outlive the initial Russia probe are missions undertaken by Mr. Nunes. He has put in place what amounts to a separate investigation of the FBI and the Justice Department hierarchy.

There are three main components:

• Fusion GPS. The Democrat-friendly opposition research firm and Mr. Nunes have squared off in U.S. District Court over access to Fusion's financial transactions. Fusion funded the infamous Trump–Russia dossier with money from Mrs. Clinton's campaign and the Democratic National Committee.

• The FBI and the dossier. Republicans want to know how the document's unconfirmed felony accusations fueled the bureau's counterintelligence investigation since July 2016.

• Investigative bias. The committee is demanding appearances from Justice officials who seemed out to get Mr. Trumpand/or had ties to the dossier's distribution.

On Fusion, Mr. Nunes has used his subpoena power to seek records of Fusion's financial transactions between law firms, journalists and media companies.

Fusion, founded by former Wall Street Journal reporters, notably Glenn Simpson, argues its records are protected by First Amendment rights.

The Washington Examiner reported that a key subpoenaed witness is David Kramer, an associate of Senate Armed Services Chairman John McCain, Arizona Republican. Mr. Kramer is one of the few people known to have possessed a hard copy of the dossier.

At the behest of Mr. McCain, Mr. Kramer represented the senator at a Nov. 28,

2016, meeting with Christopher Steele in Surrey, England. A British ex-spy, Mr. Steele compiled the 35 pages of memos making up the dossier based on his paid Kremlin sources, some close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Kramer then obtained a copy of the dossier from Fusion GPS. Mr. McCain hand-delivered a copy to then-FBIdirector James B. Comey in December 2016.

Mr. Kramer may be able to disclose the identities of Mr. Steele's Moscow sources.

Mr. Kramer has been deposed by attorneys for Russian entrepreneur Aleksej Gubarev, who is suing the news website BuzzFeed and Mr. Steele for libel over dossier allegations.

A Gubarev attorney told The Washington Times that they now know who gave the dossier to BuzzFeed but cannot publicly identify the person because of a court gag order.

The Daily Caller asked Mr. McCain in October if he supplied the dossier to BuzzFeed.

"I gave it to no one except for the director of the FBI. I don't know why you're digging this up now," Mr. McCain replied.

The bias element

According to an interview in Mother Jones magazine, Mr. Steele said he supplied his memos — the ones accusing Mr. Trump of a Russia conspiracy — to the FBI in "early July" 2016. Mr. Comey has testified he began the counterintelligence investigation in "late July."

The early memos (they eventually spanned from June to December) accuse the Trump team of a far-reaching conspiracy with the Kremlin to damage Mrs. Clinton.

Mr. Steele said the FBI asked for more of his memos in early August.

BuzzFeed at some point also obtained a copy and posted it in full on Jan. 10, 2017.

Concerning the FBI, Mr. Nunes wants more information on how the bureau used the document to investigate Trumppeople. He has been in a behind-the-scenes battle to gain access to FBI documents, only to be rebuffed.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan, Wisconsin Republican, intervened by openly urging the FBI to cooperate. It then showed Mr. Nunes‘ staff a limited amount of information.

An impatient Mr. Nunes on Dec. 28 came close to accusing Justice and the bureau of a cover-up.

In a letter to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, Mr. Nunes said the Department of Justice at first said dossier-related FBI interview summaries, known as 302s, “did not exist.”

Weeks later, under an Aug. 24 subpoena, DOJ suddenly located “numerous FD-302s pertaining to the Steele dossier, thereby rendering the initial response disingenuous at best,” the House intel committee chief wrote.

Based on the stonewalling, Mr. Nunes said the committee no longer can accept Justice’s position that it cannot turn over other official investigative forms, called 1032s. They document meetings between the FBI and confidential human sources.

“As a result of the numerous delays and discrepancies that have hampered the process of subpoena compliance, the committee no longer credits the representations made by DOJ and/or the FBI regarding these matters,” Mr. Nuneswrote.

He gave the Justice Department until Wednesday to comply.

“Unfortunately, DOJ/FBI’s intransigence with respect to the August 24 subpoenas is part of a broader pattern of behavior that can no longer be tolerated,” Mr. Nunes wrote. “At this point, it seems the DOJ and FBI need to be investigating themselves.”

A third area of committee inquiry is anti-Trump bias by investigators.

In December, the committee heard closed-door testimony from Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe. He was asked what the bureau confirmed among the dossier’s core collusion charges. He said just one: a trip to Moscow by Trumpcampaign volunteer Carter Page to deliver a public speech to a university.

Mr. McCabe headed the Clinton email investigation after his wife received nearly $700,000 in campaign donations from the Democratic Party and a PAC controlled by a close Clinton ally, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe. Jill McCabe lost her state Senate race in 2015.

Justice Department Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz is investigating whether Mr. McCabe should have recused himself from the probe, which did not recommend criminal charges against Mrs. Clinton.

Mr. Nunes also wants testimony from FBI agent Peter Strzok. He headed the Trump inquiry until special counsel Robert Mueller fired him in July over his biased text messages to his FBI lover, Lisa Page. On his FBI-issued phone, Mr. Strzok texted about an unspecified “insurance policy” to keep Mr. Trump from winning the election. Mr. Nunes also demands that Ms. Page to be made available for interviews.

Also on the witness list in 2018 is senior Justice Department lawyer Bruce Ohr. He met with Mr. Steele during the election and with Fusion GPS afterwards. His wife worked as a Russia expert at Fusion, where she may have participated in the company’s anti-Trump campaign behind the scenes.

Source: https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/jan/1/devin-nunes-expands-russia-probe-use-Trump-dossier/

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