

White House Official: Trump to Approve Release of Classified Russia Memo

A White House official says President Donald Trump plans to approve the release of a classified memo alleging that top law enforcement officials were biased against the president.

The official says the president is “OK” with it and will likely inform Congress of his decision Friday. The official said it would likely be released without anything edited out.

Trump is at odds with both the FBI and the Justice Department over whether to make the memo public.

Few people outside Congress have read the “Nunes memo,” named for the Republican congressman who drafted it. It allegedly includes details about Justice Department efforts before the 2016 U.S. presidential election to seek authority from the Federal Intelligence Surveillance Court to monitor a Trump campaign adviser’s possible contacts with Russian operatives.

U.S. Representative Devin Nunes (R-CA), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, listens as President Donald Trump addresses the Republican congressional retreat at the Greenbrier resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, Feb. 1, 2018.

Democrats and other critics of the memo say it selectively uses classified intelligence to allege the Russia investigation is affected by political bias. Democrats have prepared their own memo, countering the Republican claims, but that memo is not expected to be released until later, if at all.

The top two Democrats in Congress, Senate minority leader Charles Schumer and House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, denounced the memo Thursday and criticized Republican leaders for allegedly putting partisanship ahead of the rule of law. The Democrats called for the removal of House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes over his role in creating the memo.

The partisan dispute has also drawn in the FBI. The bureau has issued a highly unusual public statement, saying it had “grave concerns” about the accuracy of the memo.

FILE – House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-California), left, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-New York) speak during a briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington, Nov. 2, 2017.

One former FBI official still in touch with colleagues at the bureau, who spoke to VOA on condition of anonymity, said the reputation of the FBI is at stake in the dispute over release of the memo.

“When you have politicians attack these institutions for their own political gains, that weakens the credibility of those institutions to the general public,” the ex-official said. “Everyday citizens are going to say, ‘Well maybe the FBI is slanted. Maybe the CIA is slanted. Maybe our government cannot be trusted the way it should be.’”

The FBI Agents Association said in a statement Thursday that it appreciates Director Christopher Wray “standing shoulder to shoulder with the men and women of the FBI as we work together to protect our country from criminal and national security threats.”

It said the FBI remains “focused on our important work to protect the country from terrorists and criminals.” The association says FBI agents take an oath both to the country and to the Constitution.

Nunes called the FBI’s objections to release of the memo “spurious.”

“The FBI is intimately familiar with ‘material omissions’ with respect to their presentations to both Congress and the courts, and they are welcome to make public, to the greatest extent possible, all the information they have on these abuses,” Nunes said in a statement.

“Regardless, it’s clear that top officials used unverified information in a court document to fuel a counterintelligence investigation during an American political campaign. Once the truth gets out, we can begin taking steps to ensure our intelligence agencies and courts are never misused like this again.”

Special Counsel Robert Mueller departs after a closed-door meeting with

members of the Senate Judiciary Committee about Russian meddling in the election and possible connection to the Trump campaign, at the Capitol in Washington, June 21, 2017.

The memo concerns an application by U.S. law enforcement authorities to the surveillance court to monitor contacts Trump campaign adviser Carter Page may have had with Russian operatives leading up to the election. Some Republicans say the surveillance request may have been mishandled and suggest the episode could undermine special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of Russian meddling in the election and whether Trump obstructed justice to try to impede the probe.

The memo has become a flashpoint in politically divided Washington, with some Republicans increasingly voicing complaints about Mueller's months-long investigation and claiming that some Justice Department officials have worked to undermine Trump's presidency.

Trump has repeatedly said there was no collusion between his campaign and Russia. Last week, he said there also was no obstruction of the Russia investigation.

National Security Correspondent Jeff Seldin contributed to this article.

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