

House Intel chair was on the White House grounds the day before he dropped Trump surveillance bombshell



Rep. Devin Nunes. Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Rep. Devin Nunes, the chair of the House Intelligence Committee, was on White House grounds the day before he briefed President Donald Trump on intelligence he said showed the president and his advisers may have had their communications "incidentally collected" by the intelligence community during the transition period.

[Speaking with CNN](#), Nunes, a member of Trump's transition team, said he was on the White House grounds, which includes buildings such as the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, but was not in the White House itself. He added that the Trump administration was not aware he was there.

The purpose of Nunes' trip to the White House grounds, he said, was to view the information he obtained in a secure setting.

When asked why Nunes couldn't have viewed the documents at the Capitol, his spokesman told Business Insider that because the information "comprised executive-branch documents that have not been provided to Congress," the White House grounds "was the best location to safeguard the proper chain of custody and classification of these documents."

"Because of classification rules, the source could not simply put the documents in a backpack and walk them over to the House Intelligence Committee space," Nunes' spokesman, Jack Langer, said on Monday. "The White House grounds was the best location to safeguard the proper chain of custody and classification of these documents so the chairman could view them in a legal way."

Nunes reiterated that in an [interview with Bloomberg](#) on Monday. "We don't have networked access to these kinds of reports in Congress," Nunes said, referring to the executive-branch reports he says he obtained from an intelligence official.

Nunes' office said in an earlier statement that the California congressman was investigating "the possible improper unmasking of names of US citizens" before Trump made his unfounded Twitter claim in early March that Trump Tower had been wiretapped by President Barack Obama. Nunes has said no evidence supports the president's claim.

*Rep. Devin Nunes and Rep. Adam Schiff in Washington, DC, on March 15 speaking with the media about the ongoing Russia investigation.
REUTERS/Aaron P. Bernstein*

Still, Nunes told Bloomberg he had reached out to his "network of whistleblowers" over the past month to try to determine which kind of surveillance, if any, Trump's transition team had been under. Some have cast doubt, however, on the idea that a whistleblower would meet with Nunes on White House grounds to give him classified executive-branch documents.

"No whistleblower I've ever heard of would set up a meeting on White House grounds with the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee," The Washington Post's national security correspondent, Greg Miller, told CNN.

"You know who generally doesn't leak classified info to congressional intelligence committees using a White House SCIF? Whistleblowers," [said Ali Watkins](#), BuzzFeed News' national security correspondent, referring to a Secured Compartmented Information Facility.

During Monday's press briefing, White House press secretary Sean Spicer [said he would not](#) "get into who [Nunes] met with or why he met with them" on the White House grounds. Spicer said the "source" who gave Nunes the information was not leaking in the same way the White House has condemned because the intelligence chairman is cleared to see such information.

Nunes [caused a stir last week](#) when he [told the press and Trump](#) that he had seen reports showing that the intelligence community "incidentally collected" information about Trump and his team during the transition period. He said the collection occurred on "numerous occasions" and was not related to the FBI's investigation into Russian meddling in last year's presidential election, making it OK for him to share it with the president.

Nunes was asked whether the information he shared came directly from the White House, which he would not confirm or deny, stressing that "we have to keep our sources and methods here very, very quiet." The House Intelligence chair said his decision to brief Trump was a "judgment call."

The episode stunned many, including members of the House Intelligence Committee, who were not briefed about the information before Nunes went to the press and to Trump.

The ranking Democrat on the committee, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, blasted Nunes for the move, saying it compromised their committee's investigation.

"At this point, the only people who do know are the chairman and the president," [Schiff told NPR](#). "And given that the president's associates are the subject in part of the investigation, that's wholly

inappropriate, and, unfortunately, I think it really impugns the credibility of the chairman in terms of his ability to conduct an independent investigation."

Schiff [told reporters on Friday](#) that Nunes had canceled an open House Intelligence Committee hearing set for this week with former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, former CIA Director John Brennan, and former acting Attorney General Sally Yates.

Democratic Rep. Jim Himes, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, told CNN on Monday that the committee had been kept "totally out of the loop" on Nunes' actions and whereabouts.