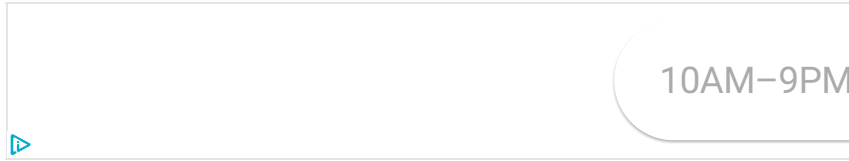




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POLITICS 10/01/2019 11:56 am ET | Updated 3 hours ago

GOP Sen. Chuck Grassley Defends Ukraine Whistleblower Amid Trump Attacks

The veteran Republican, a longtime advocate of whistleblower safeguards, said the Trump complainant “ought to be heard out and protected.”

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WASHINGTON — Sen. [Chuck Grassley](#) (R-Iowa), a longtime advocate of government [whistleblower](#) protections, issued an implicitly sharp rebuke of President [Donald Trump](#) and his allies on Tuesday by voicing support for the [Ukraine](#) whistleblower.

“This person appears to have followed the whistleblower

protection laws and ought to be heard out and protected,” Grassley, said in a [statement released by his office](#). “We should always work to respect whistleblowers’ requests for confidentiality.”

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Trump and his allies have repeatedly maligned the anonymous intelligence community whistleblower’s motives in recent days as the House impeachment inquiry intensifies. Over the weekend, the president accused the person of “spying” on him and suggested the whistleblower’s sources ought to be executed. He also told reporters on Monday “we’re trying to find out” the person’s identity.

Lawyers representing the whistleblower have expressed concern for their client’s safety, stressing the person is entitled to anonymity under the law.

Republican lawmakers, meanwhile, have been trying to undermine the whistleblower’s complaint, which alleged Trump asked the president of Ukraine to investigate 2020 election rival Joe Biden and Biden’s son Hunter. They echoed the White House’s own talking points in arguing the whistleblower isn’t a *real* whistleblower because the person did not witness the president’s actions firsthand.

“The definition of a whistleblower is somebody who has firsthand knowledge of a situation. So I think that we are giving

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too much credence, or at least credit, to someone who does not meet the definition of a whistleblower,” Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) told reporters last week.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) agreed, saying Sunday on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” “We’re not going to try the president of the United States on hearsay.”

But Grassley, who sees nothing wrong with Trump’s July 25 phone call with the Ukrainian president referenced in the whistleblower’s complaint, seemed to undercut both points. He urged everyone not to make “judgments or pronouncements without hearing from the whistleblower first and carefully following up on the facts,” cautioning that speculation about their identity by “politicians or media commentators” doesn’t serve the country’s interests.

He also pushed back against claims made by his GOP colleagues about the complaint, which was deemed credible by both Trump’s director of national intelligence and the intelligence community inspector general.

“The distinctions being drawn between first- and second-hand knowledge aren’t legal ones,” Grassley said. “It’s just not part of whistleblower protection law or any agency policy. Complaints based on second-hand information should not be rejected out of hand, but they do require additional leg work to get at the facts and evaluate the claim’s credibility.”

The Iowa Republican has spent decades advocating on behalf of whistleblowers. In 2015, he [co-founded the Senate Whistleblower Protection Caucus](#) to raise awareness for the need for protection against retaliation of private sector and government employees who call attention to wrongdoing.

Grassley is the first Republican member of the group to speak out in defense of the whistleblower. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), another member of the caucus, said that what really concerned



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him was that the whistleblower complaint was leaked in the first place.

“I’m a big supporter of whistleblower protection. Who should not be protected is whoever leaked this. If this whistleblower leaked this, then [that person] does not deserve [whistleblower] protections,” Johnson [told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) last week.

News of the whistleblower’s complaint first broke last month after Trump’s Justice Department blocked intelligence officials from giving it to Congress, as required by law. The DOJ decision was not made public until after the complaint was released.

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), another member of the caucus who has [praised whistleblowers for having the courage to speak out](#), told reporters last week he was “trying to figure out whether or not the person who is called the whistleblower is actually a whistleblower as described by the statute.” The North Carolina Republican is facing a primary challenge ahead of his reelection bid next year.

Stephen Kohn, a top whistleblower attorney, called Republican complaints about secondhand information in the Ukraine complaint “completely distorted.”

“For example, someone overhears a conversation about committing a murder or robbery. You can report that conversation, even though you never witnessed the crime. That conversation is important evidence inasmuch as it can provide law enforcement with the ‘tip’ needed to investigate or solve a crime. This happens every day,” Kohn said.

This article has been updated with more details on what Republicans have said about the whistleblower.

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