



Sen. Grassley facing pressure from GOP to lift holds on Obama nominees

By Andrew Feinberg - 04/19/12 05:57 PM ET

Republican senators are pressuring Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) to release holds on two of President Obama's nominees for the Federal Communications Commission.

The nominations of Republican Ajit Pai and Democrat Jessica Rosenworcel have been held up since last December, when both were approved by the Senate Commerce Committee.

GOP aides said Republicans are growing impatient for Grassley to release his holds. They say Republicans were willing to back Grassley's effort to win more information about a waiver the FCC provided to LightSquared, which sought to build a new mobile network. But they argue now it is time to lift the holds.

"Other GOP Senators have had private conversations with Grassley," to raise their concerns, said one of the aides, who predicted the issue could be resolved soon.

Grassley's office denied that he has been under pressure from fellow Republicans, saying he has had support from his colleagues.

The holds are sensitive partly because Pai was personally recommended for the post by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky).

The Iowa Republican placed the holds to force the FCC to provide documents on its decision to allow LightSquared's bid to operate a hybrid ground-satellite mobile network move forward.

LightSquared planned to launch a nationwide 4G wireless network, but tests showed its signals would interfere with GPS devices.

After a review concluded there was no feasible way to fix the interference problem, the FCC pulled the company's waiver and has now moved to block the launch of its network.

Grassley is questioning why the FCC allowed LightSquared to get as far as it did in the regulatory process, and has suggested political connections may have played a role.

The FCC said it would only turn over the documents requested by Grassley to the committees of jurisdiction. The documents then were requested by House Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-Mich), who subsequently made them available to Grassley.

Republican aides said the documents do not suggest any political pressure or wrongdoing.

One aide said Grassley keeps "moving the goalposts" on what he would need to lift the holds.

But the spokeswoman for Grassley said the Iowa Republican "has received strong support from his fellow Republicans in his efforts to bring transparency to the FCC."

She said Grassley "hasn't received any pushback from the Republican caucus on the substance of his investigation."

The spokeswoman also criticized the FCC for only producing documents that could be obtained on the Internet.

"This is not transparency. It's just playing games with phantom page counts to mislead the public," she said. "Senator Grassley's understanding is that the FCC has more than 19,000 pages of non-public, internal documents readily available that it intends to finally begin producing next week. The FCC should stop stonewalling and start producing those documents. Senator Grassley's request has been pending with the agency for nearly a year. As soon as the agency cooperates in good faith, there will be no need to maintain his hold on the nominees."

Source:

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