

Did President Trump Call for Paul Ryan to Step Down?

For weeks, the Washington, D.C., rumor mill has been buzzing about the White House's growing frustration with Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), exacerbated by his failure to bring conservatives into the fold and pass the American Health Care Act.

And while the public signs from President Donald Trump have been that everything is OK between him and congressional GOP leadership, something odd happened Saturday morning that really got the rumor mill running full speed. The president put out the following tweet:

Watch @JudgeJeanine on @FoxNews tonight at 9:00 P.M.

Jeanine Pirro opened her "Justice" program with a statement in which she called for Ryan to step down as House speaker because he failed to deliver the votes needed for passage of the American Health Care Act. She laid the blame squarely at the speaker's feet:

I want to be clear, this is not on President Trump. No one expected a business man to completely understand the nuances, the complicated ins and outs of Washington and its legislative process. How would he know which individuals upon which he would be able to rely?

White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, who is also rumored to be in hot water with the president of late, quickly defended his fellow Wisconsinite by saying the tweet was merely coincidental. However, he didn't suggest what other element of Pirro's program the president was encouraging his Twitter audience to watch.

See the video above for Pirro's complete statement.

Asked about the failed vote and Ryan's status as Speaker of the House, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said it was a matter for House Republicans to decide.

In the run-up to the non-vote, the *New York Times* reported that Vice President Mike Pence was keen to protect the president by insisting that the AHCA be referred to as "Ryancare," not "Trumpcare." However, "Trumpcare" is a phrase that was being used by Democrats throughout the week leading up to the bill's failure.

Pence's office later issued a statement denying the *Times* report.

"He believes what he said in the Oval Office on Friday, he doesn't blame Paul Ryan," Priebus told Chris Wallace on "FOX News Sunday" when asked about the connection between the tweet and Pirro's statement. "He thought Paul Ryan worked really hard, enjoys his relationship with Paul Ryan, thinks that Paul Ryan is a great speaker of the house. None of that has changed."

Although Priebus did little to assuage the bad blood rumors, Axios' Jonathan Swan provided a thoughtful theory that at least makes sense: in-network promotions for "Justice" teased Pirro's claim that the show would include "new revelations on Trump's allegations that former President Barack Obama's administration surveilled his campaign and transition." The reporter then tweeted:

Per leadership aide: "The president and speaker spoke by phone for almost an hour today about regrouping and moving forward on the agenda."

"Leadership aide" is a euphemism Ryan's aides prefer to have used in blind attributions. A short time later, the president put out his own tweet in which he appeared to blame the House Freedom Caucus for the failed vote, making the connection between that and federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

But, according to Breitbart News, the bill was likely to have up to 100 Republicans voting against it. Most of them were moderates, not members of the Freedom Caucus:

Part of the reason why Ryan urged Trump to call off the vote he previously wanted—several House GOP leadership sources close to the Speaker tell Breitbart News—is because Ryan did not want the president to know what people like Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) have been saying all along was true: the bill did not have much support inside the Republican conference in the House. Sen. Paul even said in an interview with Breitbart News that Speaker Ryan was deliberately misleading the president on this front. A floor vote would have demonstrated that fact, since more moderates—again, as many as 100 Republicans were prepared to vote against the bill—would have voted against it than House Freedom Caucus members.