



How a bad-faith attack on Schiff made its way from Twitter to Trump's lips

Rep. Elise Stefanik is accusing the House intel chair of treating Republicans unfairly, but all he did was try to enforce the rules.

By Aaron Rupar | @atrupar | Nov 15, 2019, 4:40pm EST



Stefanik questions Yovanovitch on Friday. | Caroline Brehman/CQ-Roll Call/Getty Images

At one point during **Friday's impeachment hearing** with former US ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch, House Intelligence Committee Chair Adam Schiff (D-CA) shut down Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY). He did so not to silence her, but because she was violating **the rules the House approved** to guide the impeachment hearing.

Nonetheless, within a matter of minutes, right-wing media, with an assist from Stefanik, spun the incident into a story about Schiff wronging the only Republican woman partaking in the impeachment hearing — a narrative that quickly made its way to President Donald Trump.

The impeachment inquiry rules specify that both Democrats and Republicans have 45-minute blocks of time during which the chair or ranking member and their counsels can ask witnesses questions. Other members are not allowed to ask questions during that time, but do have individual five-minute questioning periods afterward.

Nonetheless, when the Republican 45-minute block began, intelligence committee ranking member Devin Nunes (R-CA) almost immediately tried to delegate his time to Stefanik. Schiff quickly stepped in to point out that Republicans were violating the rules.

“Under the House Resolution 660, you’re not allowed to yield time except to minority counsel,” Schiff said.

“You’re gagging the young lady from New York?” Nunes replied, indignantly.

“This is the fifth time you have interrupted a duly-elected members of Congress,” Stefanik interjected, before the hearing proceeded with Republican counsel Steve Castor asking questions.

(In case you’re interested, Schiff was right about **the rules** — members can defer their five-minute questioning block to another lawmaker, but the 45-minute blocks are only for the two parties’ ranking members and their staff. Stefanik had her chance to ask Yovanovitch questions later.)

This might not seem like a big deal in a vacuum. But within minutes, Stefanik posted a tweet characterizing a situation in which Schiff was merely trying to enforce the rules as one where Republicans were being singled out.

Once again, Adam Schiff flat out REFUSES to let duly elected Members of Congress ask questions to the witness, simply because we are Republicans. His behavior is unacceptable and he continues to abuse his Chairmanship. Watch pic.twitter.com/qm9Uj8tiHO

— Elise Stefanik (@EliseStefanik) November 15, 2019

Minutes later, Daily Wire staffer Ryan Saavedra posted a tweet framing the incident as one in which “Schiff’s behavior toward Elise Stefanik is appalling.”

“If a Republican did this the media and the Democrat Party would instantly accuse them of being sexist,” he wrote, above video of the exchange. (Republicans have been criticized for interrupting Democratic congresswomen in recent years, but typically in cases when they interrupt **during a congresswoman’s allotted questioning time.**)



A short time later, the Schiff-Stefanik exchange was the top story on Fox News’s webpage, with framing not dissimilar from Saavedra’s tweet.

The story soon found its way onto TV when Fox News contributor Andy McCarthy criticized Schiff’s move to enforce the rules as “**a tactical error.**” Later, Trump himself got in on the act, retweeting **a post** from House Republicans that asked, “Why is Chairman Schiff afraid

of @RepStefanik?" And during a media availability a short time later, Trump lamented that "they've taken away the Republicans' rights" because "they weren't able to ask questions."



The episode illustrates how bad-faith attacks can quickly make their way from Twitter to Fox News to the president's lips. But it also illustrates how Republicans are struggling to defend Trump's conduct on the merits. Instead of making a case that Trump was right to oust Yovanovitch earlier this year from her post as US ambassador to Ukraine during a time in which he tried to leverage diplomacy into political favors, they're attacking the process and suggesting that Schiff is simply a bad dude with partisan motives.

It's misleading — but it provides a useful way for Republicans to cry foul about impeachment without having to actually defend Trump. For instance, during a media availability after the hearing concluded, Stefanik again characterized Republicans getting called out for running afoul of the rules as “just more of the ridiculous abuse of power that we see from Adam Schiff.”



Stefanik went on to **dismiss** a question about whether she was troubled by Trump posting tweets that were widely viewed as trying to intimidate Yovanovitch during her testimony, saying “the only people that were limited from asking questions were Republican members because we were muzzled by Adam Schiff.”

*The news moves fast. To stay updated, follow **Aaron Rugar** on Twitter, and read more of **Vox's policy and politics coverage.***

If you value Vox, we have an ask

To understand the news, you have to understand the systems that shape society. Our reporters and editors spend hours finding data, doing research, and talking to experts to clearly explain these systems, including historical context, problems, and potential solutions. Our aim is to give people clear information that empowers them to shape the world in which they live. **Please consider making a contribution to Vox today, from as little as \$3, to help us keep our work free for all.**