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## Stevens asked to step down from committees

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WASHINGTON - A day following the federal raid on his Girdwood home, watchdog groups called on U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens to step down from any Senate committees where he oversees appropriations.

Both Taxpayers for Common and Sense and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics today asked Republican leaders to request that Stevens at least temporarily step down until the investigation was resolved.

"It is imperative that no member under federal investigation be involved in the oversight or appropriations of any agency involved in investigating that member," said Melanie Sloan, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. "Sen. Stevens should immediately step down from his position on the Appropriations subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies."

It wasn't clear Tuesday how Senate Republican leaders would handle the matter. Stevens is the only sitting U.S. senator known to be under active federal investigation.

Stevens reportedly received dozens of phone calls Tuesday morning from friends and colleagues offering their support. Two fellow senators stepped out publicly: Fellow Alaskan Republican Lisa Murkowski and Sen Trent Lott, R-Miss.

"Sen. Stevens has served his country and the state of Alaska with distinction for over 60 years," Murkowski said. "With the current investigation under way, it is not appropriate to jump to conclusions until the process is complete. Sen. Stevens has the right to have the facts established in this matter."

Lott was equally admiring of his longtime colleague. Lott is one of the Senate minority leaders as Republican whip.

"We all know Ted Stevens as a good man, a tireless advocate for improving the quality of life in Alaska, a decorated veteran and a true patriot of our country. He's asked us to await all information during this investigation, and I will while I'm standing by our longest-serving colleague."

Dozens of reporters staked out Stevens' Senate office in the hopes of catching him. They also waited for Stevens outside a Commerce subcommittee meeting where former Vice Adm. Thomas Barrett awaited a confirmation vote for a key spot in the Department of Transportation overseeing pipelines.

Stevens, a committee member, did not attend the meeting, and Barrett was introduced by Murkowski.

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