

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2020

Dear Minority Leader Schumer, Senator Warner, Speaker Pelosi, and Chairman Schiff:

For at least one week before we received access to it, the press reported on your July 13, 2020 letter and its classified addendum that you sent to FBI Director Christopher Wray raising concerns about foreign interference in the upcoming elections.¹ Although the addendum identifies one of our ongoing investigations, you did not copy us on the letter. In fact, we did not receive access to the classified addendum until late last week. The fact that the press knew more about the content of the allegedly classified material than we did indicates that you are more interested in grabbing headlines and scoring political points than actually addressing and confronting the issue of foreign interference in our elections.

Your misplaced motives aside, the substance of your letter and addendum also grossly mischaracterizes our investigation in an effort to shoehorn it into the false “Russian disinformation” narrative you have promoted for years. Although it is undisputed that Russia interfered in the 2016 elections, as they have done in the past and will continue to do in the future, you have twisted this fact beyond recognition to forge a weapon for the purpose of attacking your political opponents no matter its tenuous relationship with facts or the truth. For example, our investigation is focused on Obama administration records from the State Department, National Archives, Department of Justice, other federal agencies, and the U.S. consulting firm Blue Star Strategies, as well as speaking with current and former U.S. government officials. How, exactly, is this disinformation? Is it the *one* foreign national we spoke with about his ties to the Obama administration; a DNC operative; and Blue Star Strategies, a prominent Democratic consulting firm?

The only relevant disinformation we are aware of are documents that you referenced in your letter and that your colleagues have introduced into our investigation. For example, your letter references a document, created by a Ukrainian national, that mentions our name along with other Republican senators and administration officials to suggest falsely that we might have received information from this individual. Liberal media outlets have picked up that reference, clearly from a leak, even though we have not received any information from that person, including tapes, and we both have publicly and privately stated as much. Thus it is you, not us, who have participated in the spread of disinformation.

¹ See, e.g., Natasha Bertrand *et al.*, *Dem leaders demand FBI briefing on ‘foreign interference campaign’ targeting lawmakers*, Politico, July 20, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/20/democrats-fbi-briefing-foreign-interference-campaign-373134> (citing “two people familiar with the demand” to identify our investigation).

We have neither sought out, relied upon, nor publicly released anything that could even remotely be considered disinformation. Insofar as foreign adversaries seek to exploit actual political differences (a nuance of disinformation your letter and narrative fails to appreciate), your press-ready letter likely has been more successful than any Russian troll-farm in amplifying our political differences on this investigation. Far from promoting Russian disinformation, our investigation is focused on uncovering the facts concerning what did and did not occur so that we can put these matters to rest.

Finally, your allegations also ring hollow in light of your long-running, hypocritical conduct on this issue. Since 2016, you and your colleagues have promoted and amplified the false narrative that the Trump campaign “colluded” with Russia. However, as more and more information finally sees the light of day, we are learning just how wrong you were. And not just wrong, but knowingly wrong; you pushed this false narrative even though, behind closed doors, you repeatedly saw and heard evidence to the contrary.² For example, in April, we sought and received declassified versions of footnotes in the Justice Department Inspector General’s FISA report. Among other things, those footnotes revealed that the FBI received reporting in January 2017 and February 2017 that parts of the Democratic National Committee’s and Clinton Campaign’s Steele dossier were part of a Russian disinformation campaign.³ In March 2017, Chairman Schiff literally used the platform of his committee to read parts of the Steele dossier—i.e., likely Russian disinformation—into the Congressional record and political narrative of the day.⁴ For years you have publicly used the dossier as a cudgel to achieve your political ends at the sacrifice of domestic peace and tranquility. Your recent letter is a chip off the old block.

² Compare, e.g., U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Office of Inspector Gen., Review of Four FISA Applications and Other Aspects of the FBI’s Crossfire Hurricane Investigation xiii (Dec. 2019) (identifying “at least 17 significant errors and omissions in the Carter Page FISA applications”), <https://www.justice.gov/storage/120919-examination.pdf> (“DOJ OIG Report”) with Memorandum from HPSCI Minority to House of Representatives, “Correcting the Record – The Russian Investigations” at 1 (Jan. 29, 2018) (“DOJ met the rigor, transparency, and evidentiary basis needed to meet FISA’s probable cause standard”) <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/ig/ig00/20180205/106838/hmtg-115-ig00-20180205-sd002.pdf> (“Rep. Schiff Memo”). Compare also DOJ OIG Report at 359 (concluding that the Steele dossier “played a central and essential role in the decision by FBI OGC to support the request for FISA surveillance targeting Carter Page”) with Rep. Schiff Memo at 1 (“DOJ ... made only narrow use of information from Steele’s sources about Page’s specific activities[.]”); and DOJ OIG Report at 196 (“[A]s of September 2017, the FBI had corroborated limited information in the Steele election reporting, and much of that information was publicly available.”) with Rep. Schiff Memo at 4 (“DOJ provided additional information obtained through multiple independent sources that corroborated Steele’s reporting”).

³ Letter from Richard Grenell, Acting Dir. of Nat’l Intelligence, to Sens. Charles E. Grassley & Ron Johnson, Chairmen (Apr. 15, 2020), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04-15%20ODNI%20to%20CEG%20RHJ%20%28FISA%20Footnote%20Declassification%29.pdf>.

⁴ Maya Rhodan, *Read Rep. Adam Schiff’s Opening Statement on Russian Meddling in the Election*, Time, Mar. 20, 2017, <https://time.com/4706721/comey-hearing-adam-schiff-transcript/>.

It is certainly our goal to eradicate foreign influence from our elections. But your use of this issue to knowingly and recklessly promote false narratives for political purposes is completely contrary to that goal. Your letter and its targeted leak to selected liberal media outlets do more to amplify Ukrainian voices that you assert are engaged in disinformation and results in more alleged disinformation being inserted in the Congressional record and public record than if you respected the serious work of our committees. One must question whether you are truly concerned about disinformation given the vast amounts of it that you have pushed into the public sphere. For these reasons, we are happy to call for continued briefings from the FBI and Intelligence Community as we enter this election season, but those briefings must account for all foreign threats, not just Russia, to ensure Congress sees the full picture. We also call on you to stop playing political games with this issue. It is simply too important.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on Finance