

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 28, 2020

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Ranking Members Peters and Wyden:

We write in response to your July 16, 2020 letter, which “reiterate[s]” a request for a member briefing from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and relevant members of the Intelligence Community (IC). As you are fully aware, the FBI advised all of us during a March 2020 staff briefing that there was nothing to preclude the continuation of our investigation. Nevertheless, HSGAC Majority and Minority requested a member briefing from these agencies months ago. Those agencies made clear to our staff that they did not have any additional information to provide and that the relevant written products members have had access to for months speak for themselves. Democratic minority staff nonetheless insisted on a member briefing to answer a list of additional questions, but to our knowledge they have not followed-up on that request since mid-May. Your letter glosses over all of these facts.

We also find it interesting that your letter to us was soon followed by a letter from Senate Minority Leader Schumer and Speaker of the House Pelosi, asking the FBI for a briefing on the same matters. Although we were not provided a copy of that letter and its classified attachment, news reports regarding the alleged classified portion suggest that it continues to falsely accuse us of having received information from foreign nationals about former Vice President Joe Biden, including audio tapes. Not only is that an apparent classified leak, but that allegation is false and you know it because we told you it was false right after those reports were published. Yet, as with your repeated public requests for a member briefing that seem designed to suggest that we are somehow denying members access to briefings and relevant intelligence, Democrats and Mr. Biden’s campaign prefer to knowingly repeat false information so the liberal media will keep reporting on it. Continuing to repeat false information, including apparently classified information, will not make the allegations true. In fact, it is the very definition of a disinformation campaign—the same conduct you are falsely accusing us of participating in.

It is becoming increasingly clear that your interest in understanding “the national security and counterintelligence implications of foreign election interference” is one-sided and highly political. Indeed, during the Senate Judiciary Committee’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election and its focus on the June 2016 Trump Tower meeting, Democrats never once asked for briefings before interviewing Russian nationals, some of whom

were allegedly linked to Russian Intelligence Services. In contrast to that investigation, our investigation is focused on 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, could this be foreign or Russian disinformation? If it is, that means that the Obama administration peddled it regularly.

You seem to suggest that the cause of your concern is Andrii Telizhenko. But as you know, in March 2020 HSGAC sought to subpoena Mr. Telizhenko *only* for records from his year-long employment with Blue Star Strategies (Blue Star), a Democrat consulting firm that lobbied the U.S. government on behalf of a Ukrainian energy firm and had contacts at the highest levels of President Obama’s administration.¹ The hypocrisy shown by remaining steadfastly incurious about the work Mr. Telizhenko performed at Blue Star and the relationships he had with Obama administration officials is only second to the irony of your repeated public release of disinformation while accusing us of engaging in disinformation.

And to correct another mischaracterization, HSGAC cancelled that vote because of member reaction to grossly inaccurate Democratic staff notes of an FBI briefing which were mistakenly assumed to be a verbatim transcript. These notes were handed out hastily at the beginning of a HSGAC member meeting—without advance notice or an opportunity for our staff to review them—and were later found to include material inaccuracies. It should also be noted that during that same meeting, a bipartisan consensus developed that instead of issuing a subpoena to Mr. Telizhenko, the Committee should subpoena the records directly from Blue Star—a suggestion that all Democrats on the Committee later abandoned.

Your misguided efforts that actually assist Russian disinformation were further confirmed when our investigative work recently revealed now-declassified intelligence reporting that parts of the Steele dossier—foreign opposition research paid for by the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton campaign, and used during and after the 2016 election—were “part of a Russian disinformation campaign.”² We are not aware that you or any of your colleagues have commented publicly on this disturbing revelation. Where is your outrage regarding actual Russian disinformation contained in the Steele Dossier and Russian disinformation paid for by the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton campaign? The Steele Dossier is the very definition of election interference, yet we hear no objections from you.

¹ Additionally, prior to his work for Blue Star, as an employee at the Ukrainian embassy in Washington, D.C., Mr. Telizhenko met with White House officials from President Obama’s administration and had contact with a Democratic National Committee contractor who was asking for help to dig up dirt on the Trump campaign.

² Letter from Richard Grenell, Acting Director of National Intelligence, to Sens. Charles E. Grassley and 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>.

We hope that you will join us in rejecting any and all efforts by foreign entities to interfere in our elections, and refrain from using this issue as a political weapon to target investigations—investigations grounded in fact and that fall squarely within the Committees’ jurisdiction to safeguard our homeland security and financial systems³—with which you happen to disagree.

Finally, we want to reiterate that we have taken every precaution to protect the integrity of our investigation and keep your staffs involved in our work. Yet at every turn, we have seen leaks of sensitive information and attempts to smear and undermine our investigation—and us, personally—in the press. These attempts to discredit our investigation only serve to increase our curiosity: what are the Democrats and many in the media so afraid of us finding?

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on Finance

³ See, e.g., James Risen, *Joe Biden, His Son and the Case Against a Ukrainian Oligarch*, N.Y. Times, Dec. 8, 2015; S. Res. 70(e)(1)(A) (“The committee ... is authorized to study or investigate ... the efficiency and economy of all operations of all branches of the Government including the possible existence of ... corruption or unethical practices, ... [and] conflicts of interest[.]”).