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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

GABRIELLE D'ADAMO SINGER, STAFF DIRECTOR
DAVID M. WEINBERG, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

January 2, 2021

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

Dear Ranking Member Peters:

In a December 22, 2020 letter, you accused me of making “baseless accusations on the record, including calling [you] a liar for [your] efforts to hold [me] accountable for [my] extreme partisan actions.” Let me remind you of the facts. For months, you and your staff have repeatedly alleged that my joint investigation with Senator Grassley into apparent conflicts of interest and the Biden family was “rooted in Russian disinformation.”¹ As you know, these claims are demonstrably false. Yet you continue to repeat this debunked Russian-disinformation conspiracy theory. Moreover, by misusing the term “Russian disinformation” to advance a political smear campaign against me, you and your colleagues are only making it harder to confront actual disinformation that threatens our national security.

Among other problems, it is undisputed that members of the Biden family engaged in questionable financial conduct that, at the very least, created the appearance of several conflicts of interest and present counterintelligence concerns. In fact, news reports recently confirmed that Hunter Biden’s finances have been the subject of an ongoing criminal investigation since 2018.²

¹ HSGAC Minority Press Release, “Peters, Wyden Respond to Republican Effort to Amplify Russian Disinformation & Manufacture Dirt on Vice President Biden,” (Sept. 23, 2020) (claiming also that our investigation “advance[d] false information”); *see also*, e.g., Letter from Sen. Gary Peters, et al. to Sen. Ron Johnson (Dec. 17, 2019) (stating that the investigation “could advance the Russian disinformation and election interference efforts”); Stefan Becket & Olivia Gazi, *Senator Chris Murphy requests investigation into agencies’ cooperation on Biden, Trump probes*, CBS News (Mar. 11, 2020) (“Democratic Senator Gary Peters . . . has raised concerns that the investigation could further Russian objectives to disrupt U.S. political processes.”); Jacob Knutson, *Senate committee subpoenas documents in probe of Hunter Biden and Burisma*, Axios (May 20, 2020) (“Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) has even suggested that the probe is aiding a Russian disinformation campaign.”); Transcript of Interview at 6, S. Comm. on Fin. & S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. & Gov’t Affairs Interview of Amos Hochstein (Sept. 17, 2020) (“[HSGAC Minority Chief Counsel]: This investigation advances a Russian disinformation effort[.]” (“Hochstein Interview”).

² *See*, e.g., Matt Zapposky et al., *Hunter Biden confirms he is under federal investigation*, Wash. Post, Dec. 9, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/hunter-biden-under-federal-investigation/2020/12/09/3b7361be->

Moreover, your false claims grossly mischaracterized the evidence from our investigation. Our investigation focused almost entirely on U.S. records and interviews with current and former U.S. officials, as well as two executives from a Democrat lobbying firm. The September 23, 2020 report that Senator Grassley and I released analyzed the financial arrangements and transactions of Hunter, James, and Sarah Biden, and examined how those finances were related to U.S. policymaking. You and your staff know this because you received contemporaneous copies of those records and participated in those witness interviews.

To distract from these facts, you constructed a false narrative that relies heavily on misdirection and innuendo. Your foundational false claim is that Ukrainian national Andrii Telizhenko was a “key source” for our investigation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Notably, your letter conveniently ignores that the only reason Mr. Telizhenko was relevant to our investigation was because of his extensive work with your Democratic colleagues—his multiple meetings with Obama administration officials, his meetings with a Democratic National Committee official, and his 13-month employment with a Democratic lobbying firm—related to these matters.³ Additionally, despite your professed interest in “expos[ing]” disinformation, you remain incurious about the nature and extent of Mr. Telizhenko’s relationship with members of your own party. Similarly, you refer to the testimony of Amos Hochstein opining about the contours of our investigation—rather than matters about which he has personal knowledge—yet leave out the part where he explained that Russia was using Hunter Biden’s business arrangements to undermine U.S. policy.⁴ In any reality-based worldview, these would be precisely the type of conflict-of-interest investigations our Committee should be conducting.

In fact, the only “disinformation” in our investigative record is a document that your staff used as an exhibit during a witness interview.⁵ Your letter belatedly defends this poor decision by casting it as a noble attempt “to expose Russian disinformation, educate the public . . . , and prevent[] the Committee from spreading that disinformation further.” But your staff was “expos[ing]” something that was never in our investigative record in the first place. Thanks to your staff’s efforts, a known piece of Russian disinformation is now a permanent part of the congressional record.

3a64-11eb-9276-ae0ca72729be_story.html; Ben Schreckinger, *Justice Department’s interest in Hunter Biden covered more than taxes*, Politico (Dec. 9, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/12/09/justice-department-interest-hunter-biden-taxes-444139>.

³ You note that we “cited [Mr. Telizhenko] 42 times in [our] letters,” but this is both misleading (because the purpose of those letters was to understand the nature and extent of his relationship with several Democrats) and says nothing about our final report.

⁴ Hochstein Interview at 50 (“I shared with [Hunter Biden] that the Russians were using his name in order to sow disinformation—attempt to sow disinformation among Ukrainians.”); *id.* at 58-59 (testifying that he told Vice President Biden that “pro-Moscow outlets [] were trying to create some kind of rift between the U.S. and Ukraine or to undermine the U.S. efforts, and that they were using Hunter Biden’s name in those article to sow that doubt”).

⁵ S. Comm. on Fin. & S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. & Gov’t Affairs Staff Report, *Hunter Biden, Burisma, and Corruption: The Impact on U.S. Government Policy and Related Concerns* at 60-61 (Sept. 23, 2020) (discussing minority staff’s use of a document created by Andriy Derkach during the interview of George Kent in an attempt to impugn Chairman Grassley and myself).

The height of your hypocrisy is your selective interest in Russian disinformation. In April 2020, Senator Grassley and I published declassified information that the Clinton campaign and Democratic National Committee paid for Russian disinformation—false information invented by Russian intelligence services⁶—and promoted it as a basis for relentlessly attacking and investigating the Trump administration. I am not aware of you making any public statements acknowledging, let alone condemning, that conduct. You also profess to oppose our investigation because it “‘amplified’ a Russian attack on our election,” yet I am unaware of you condemning any other policy discussions or investigations that were used as the basis for Russian disinformation efforts.⁷

Your use of the term “Russian disinformation” has been unprincipled and dangerous. You make no effort to identify and define the Russian disinformation campaign you allege, and you make no effort to explain how that campaign in any way undermines the evidence at the heart of our investigation—financial records, concerns raised by U.S. officials, and efforts by adversaries to exploit those financial arrangements to undermine U.S. policy. Instead, you have misused the term as a smear, a blunt instrument for scoring political points no matter the truth.⁸ In doing so, you are depriving the phrase of its true meaning and potentially undermining efforts to combat actual instances of disinformation. I know this because, unlike you, I have been exposing Russian disinformation efforts since 2015.⁹

Your letter is the unfortunate culmination of the false and absurd claims about our investigation that you have been peddling for months. You may not like the politics of my

⁶ See Press Release, Chairman Charles Grassley, S. Comm. on Fin., IG Footnotes: Serious Problems with Dossier Sources Didn’t Stop FBI’s Page Surveillance (Apr. 15, 2020), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/ig-footnotes-seriousproblems-dossier-sources-didn-t-stop-fbi-s-page-surveillance>.

⁷ See, e.g., S. REP. NO. 116-290, vol. 2, at 44 (2020) (explaining that Russia’s Internet Research Agency (IRA) sought to exploit “divisive and inflammatory U.S. social issues” that “spanned the ideological and political spectrum, ranging from race, sexuality, or and gender identity, to immigration and Second Amendment right”); *id.* at 42 (describing IRA’s post-election efforts to “promot[e] hastags such as ‘#Impeach 45,’ ‘#Resist,’ and ‘#GunReformNow,’” and efforts to organize “disparate political rallies,” including a “Trump is NOT my President” rally in New York).

⁸ During our December 16, 2020 hearing, I did state that you “were involved in a process of creating a false intelligence product that was supposedly classified ... [and then] leaked to the media.” Although the letter with the attached “intelligence product” was sent by Minority Leader Schumer, Senator Warner, Speaker Pelosi, and Chairman Schiff, I did assume you or your staff were involved in the process of its creation based on your prior work with your Democratic colleagues to harm or disrupt our investigation. Specifically, my staff is aware of at least one instance when your staff shared confidential committee information with Minority Leader Schumer’s office that later was leaked to the press.

⁹ See, e.g., *Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine and the Propaganda that Threatens Europe: Hearing Before the S. Subcomm. on Europe & Reg’l Sec. Cooperation of the S. Comm. on Foreign Relations*, 114th Cong. (2015); *Southeast Europe: Strengthening Democracy and Countering Malign Foreign Influence: Hearing Before the S. Subcomm. on Europe & Reg’l Sec. Cooperation of the S. Comm. on Foreign Relations*, 115th Cong. (2017).

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investigations, but examining conflicts of interest falls squarely within our Committee's jurisdiction.¹⁰ No matter how loudly you yell "Russian disinformation," these are the facts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Ron Johnson
Chairman

¹⁰ S. Res. 70, Sec. 12(e)(1)(A), 116th Cong. ("The committee ... is authorized to study or investigate ... the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches of the Government including the possible existence of ... conflicts of interest[.]").