

Graham: Rudy Should Scrub Evidence for Russian Propaganda

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In the weeks leading up to their impeachment trial, senators on Capitol Hill are actively avoiding meeting with President Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani—partly because they fear he might try to pass off Russian conspiracy theories as fact, according to interviews with more than half a dozen Republican and Democratic lawmakers and aides.

On his trip to Kyiv last month, Giuliani met with former general prosecutors and parliamentarians known for peddling Russian conspiracy theories, including supposed plots that involve Ukrainian intervention in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and 2020 presidential candidate Joe Biden and his son Hunter. When he arrived back in Washington, Giuliani updated Trump, according to two individuals with knowledge of their conversation, and said publicly the president asked him to brief Republican senators about the information he gathered.

"He wants me to do it," Giuliani told *The Washington Post* in an interview earlier this month. "I'm working on pulling it together and hope to have it done by the end of the week."

Since then, though, various lawmakers, as well as administration officials and national security brass, have privately expressed concerns about Giuliani's latest Ukraine jaunt, given that the Trump lawyer's efforts are what helped create this Ukraine scandal and get the president impeached in the first place. Both Democrat and Republican senators have steered clear of the president's personal attorney over concern that the information he is trying to disseminate originated from figures in Ukraine known for spinning the truth or spreading outright lies.

"He has not shared any of that information with me," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) about the information Giuliani obtained overseas. "My advice to Giuliani would be to share what he got from Ukraine with the IC [intelligence community] to make sure it's not Russia propaganda. I'm very suspicious of what the Russians are up to all over the world."

Graham earlier this month called on Giuliani to testify in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee on allegations that Biden helped his son get a lucrative job at Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

While in Kyiv, Giuliani met with Andriy Derkach, a self-described political independent who attended the Dzerzhinsky Higher School of the KGB in Moscow and was for a time a member of the pro-Russia party—the Party of Regions—in the Ukrainian parliament. He also met with Oleksandr Dubinsky, a member of the parliament known for his close ties to controversial Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky. He and Derkach consistently disseminate conspiracy theories on Facebook and elsewhere. The Daily Beast recently obtained a dossier that in part contained the debunked claim that Ukraine intervened in the 2016 presidential election, a claim which had been disseminated by Derkach to Americans, including senior officials, close to President Trump.

That claim and others were aired on One America News shortly after Giuliani's visit in a documentary-style show. OAN traveled with Giuliani to Ukraine for his meetings with Derkach and Dubinsky and are currently working on a fourth segment to air sometime in the coming weeks.

As senators prep for the impeachment trial they are distancing themselves, now publicly, from Giuliani in an attempt to steer clear of his less-than-reliable associates in Kyiv.

"Rudy Giuliani long ago lost any shred of credibility, especially after the dossier he assembled for the State Department stunningly mirrored Russian propaganda," Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) told The Daily Beast. "Knowing that, anyone that attempts to defend President Trump's behavior by citing Rudy's information over our own intelligence agencies is simply irresponsible, uninformed or willing to be that useful idiot the Kremlin desires."

Giuliani has not briefed any Republican Senate leaders, including Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), according to two individuals with knowledge of the Senate leaders' schedules.

"I wouldn't trust Rudy to represent me in a parking dispute so I'd say avoid," a senior GOP Senate aide said tersely when asked if it was a good idea for Republican senators to meet with Giuliani to get a Ukraine briefing. Another top aide in a different Republican office said their senator had informed staff that they had "no interest at all" in meeting with Giuliani on this, fearing it would amount to a "waste of time," if not something worse.

And it's not just Capitol Hill that's worried about associating with Giuliani.

"I do not want my name showing up in a [news] story about what Rudy and the president discuss," said one senior White House official. "I don't want my text messages with [Giuliani] being all over cable news," this official continued, referencing the incident when Trump's personal lawyer went on Fox News and unveiled texts sent between him and Kurt Volker, the former U.S. special envoy to Ukraine. As The Daily Beast reported in early December, senior officials in the State Department and within the national security apparatus began worrying that Giuliani's ongoing crusade (which has been explicitly blessed and personally encouraged by President Trump) could hurt American foreign policy, and it even got to the point where these officials frantically devoted resources to tracking his foreign movements and figuring out who he was meeting with in Europe.

When asked about Sen. Graham's recommendation to approach the intelligence community with his materials, and if he agreed that he should do so as due diligence, Giuliani would only reply to The Daily Beast, "It's not Russian propaganda."