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Joint Statement from Committee Chairs on Release of Ukraine Call Record

Washington, September 25, 2019

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Rep. Adam Schiff, the Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, the Chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, and Rep. Eliot L. Engel, the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, issued the following statement:

“The transcript is an unambiguous, damning, and shocking abuse of the Office of the Presidency for personal political gain. This is a clear breach of trust placed in the President to faithfully execute the laws and to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.

“The record of the call released by the White House confirms our worst fears: that the President abused his office by directly and repeatedly asking a foreign country to investigate his political rival and open investigations meant to help the President politically. Not once, not twice, but more than half a dozen times during one telephone call. This was a shakedown. The President of the United States asked for a ‘favor’ after the Ukrainian President expressed his country’s need for weapons to defend against Russian aggression. The transcript also shows that the President promised follow-up by Attorney General William Barr or the President’s personal attorney Rudy Giuliani at least nine times.

“Let’s be clear: *no quid pro quo is required to betray our country. Trump asked a foreign government to interfere in our elections—that is betrayal enough.* The corruption exists whether or not Trump threatened—explicitly or implicitly—that a lack of cooperation could result in withholding military aid.

“Ukraine depends on the U.S. for economic, military, and diplomatic support—especially in its attempts to push back against Russian aggression—and is particularly vulnerable to pressure from any U.S. president. For a country so reliant on the United States, nothing more was needed.

“The call reportedly was preceded by a decision by Trump to withhold vital security assistance, and it was followed in quick succession by his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, meeting with a top aide to the new Ukrainian president at Trump’s direction. According to reports, the Ukrainians eventually became aware that the aid was being withheld and expressed concern to U.S. officials.

“Congress needs the full and unredacted whistleblower complaint. We need to speak with the whistleblower. We need records of the communications. We need to speak with those knowledgeable about efforts by the President, the Attorney General, and the President’s personal attorney to secure political help from Ukraine, the decision to freeze security assistance, and the attempt to cover it up.

"We also need the records that our Committees requested from the State Department and the White House—by tomorrow's deadline—or we will subpoena them.

"These requirements are especially urgent now that the Department of Justice apparently has chosen to stand down, whitewash this investigation, and block Congress from obtaining this information.

"Congress is now exercising its constitutional responsibility to investigate under the umbrella of impeachment, and we need cooperation immediately. Nothing less than full transparency will do when our national security is at risk."

Background:

It is also clear from the transcript that the President meant to tie this request to Ukraine's defense capability. Following the Ukrainian president's reference to defense spending, President Trump immediately asks him to open investigations. Trump says:

"I would like you to do us a favor though because our country has been through a lot and Ukraine knows a lot about it. I would like you to find out what happened with this whole situation with Ukraine, they say CrowdStrike... I guess you have one of your wealthy people... The server, they say Ukraine has it.... I would like to have the Attorney General call you or your people and I would like you to get to the bottom of it. As you saw yesterday, that whole nonsense ended with a very poor performance by a man named Robert Mueller, an incompetent performance, but they say a lot of it started with Ukraine. Whatever you can do, it's very important that you do it if that's possible."

The transcript also makes clear that President Trump asked the Ukrainian president to investigate issues related to his political opponent, former Vice President Joe Biden, and directly intervened to have his own Ambassador to Ukraine recalled.

The Ukrainian President said to President Trump: "I guarantee as the President of Ukraine that all the investigations will be done openly and candidly. That I can assure you." The President then directly requested an investigation of his political opponent, stating:

"There's a lot of talk about Biden's son, that Biden stopped the prosecution and a lot of people want to find out about that so whatever you can do with the Attorney General would be great. Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution so if you can look into it."

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