



July 23, 2020

Senator Marco Rubio
Acting Chairman
Senator Mark Warner
Vice Chairman
Senate Intelligence Committee
211 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Acting Chairman Rubio and Vice Chairman Warner:

According to published [reports](#), there is possible intelligence information that Russian agents may be seeking to corrupt the Senate and its oversight process by funneling disinformation to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in an effort to smear presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and influence the 2020 presidential election.

Homeland Security Committee Chairman Ron Johnson is leading a Committee investigation into matters involving Ukraine and former Vice President Joe Biden and his son. It is this investigation that is the subject of the possible Russian disinformation efforts. By raising the specter that the Senate Homeland Security Committee is being used as a vehicle to disseminate Russian disinformation, these reports directly threaten the institutional integrity and the security of the Senate and its committee process.

These concerns warrant the immediate attention of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which should promptly investigate this matter.

With the presidential election less than four months away, it is essential for the Intelligence Committee to quickly determine and report to the public if Russia is using the Senate and its Homeland Security Committee to influence the 2020 presidential election. Otherwise, we could face a repeat of what happened in 2016 when Russia interfered in the presidential election without public knowledge of its activities until after the fact.

In a bipartisan report earlier this year, your Committee unanimously [found](#) that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election. In February 2020, intelligence officials [reportedly](#) informed House lawmakers that Russia is repeating its efforts and attempting to interfere in the 2020 presidential election to try to get President Trump re-elected.

Under these circumstances, it is entirely plausible that Russian agents may be using the Senate to influence the coming presidential election by providing disinformation to the Senate Homeland

Security Committee in an effort to steer that Committee's investigation into smearing Vice President Biden and his family.

If the concerns raised about the Homeland Security Committee investigation are shown to be correct, the Intelligence Committee and the Senate leadership must take immediate remedial action to ensure Russian attempts to manipulate the Senate are not successful. This must include ensuring that information flowing from Russia or Russian agents into the hands of the Senate Homeland Security Committee is labeled as Russian disinformation and is not in any manner used by the Committee or by Chairman Johnson.

According to a [report](#) in *The New York Times*, congressional Democrats have warned in a letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray that "a foreign power was using disinformation to try to interfere in the presidential election and the activities of Congress."

In a classified addendum to the letter, according to *The New York Times*, they contend "that the Russian-linked information is being funneled to a committee headed by Senator Ron Johnson, the Wisconsin Republican who is investigating Mr. Biden and his son, who was once paid as a board member of a Ukrainian energy company."

According to the news report, a Ukrainian lawmaker with close ties to Russia, Andriy Derkach, "who was educated in a K.G.B.-backed school and was, until recently, closely aligned with a pro-Russian political faction in Ukraine," is involved in the disinformation campaign.

The *Times* report also says that in its ongoing investigation of former Vice President Biden's involvement with Ukraine and the involvement of his son Hunter, the Homeland Security Committee has "relied extensively on a former Ukrainian official, Andrii Telizhenko." But, according to the report, FBI officials have "warned lawmakers in a briefing that it had concerns that Mr. Telizhenko was a conduit for Russian disinformation about the Bidens and claims that Ukraine conspired to help Democrats in the 2016 election."

The Senate Intelligence Committee, on a bipartisan and unanimous basis, [established](#) that there was extensive Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. The Committee "found that the [Internet Research Agency] sought to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election by harming Hillary Clinton's chances of success and supporting Donald Trump at the direction of the Kremlin."

The Intelligence Committee has an obligation to determine if Russia or Russian agents have launched an attack on the Senate, either directly or through its agents, and if so, to defend the institution. The Committee should determine if agents of Russia are using the Senate Homeland Security Committee to discredit and politically harm Vice President Biden in the period immediately prior to the 2020 presidential election.

There should be no doubt that this is a serious matter. If the allegations are correct, this amounts to a direct attack on the Senate by a hostile foreign government. Needless to say, if Russian agents are successful in manipulating a Senate committee to disseminate disinformation in order

to affect U.S. elections, there would be incalculable damage done to the Senate as an institution and more broadly to American democracy.

This matter warrants the prompt attention of the Intelligence Committee, both to defend the Senate and to protect the upcoming national elections against foreign attack.

Democracy 21 calls on the Intelligence Committee to undertake an immediate investigation of whether Russia or Russian agents are funneling disinformation to the Senate Homeland Security Committee which could affect the presidential election. If such activity is occurring, the Intelligence Committee must immediately, and before the election, take all steps necessary to expose any efforts of Russia to influence the 2020 election and undermine our democracy.

Sincerely,

/s/ Fred Wertheimer

Fred Wertheimer

Copy to:

Members of the Senate Intelligence Committee
Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer