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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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DAVID M. WEINBERG, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

March 9, 2020

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

Dear Ranking Member Peters:

As I explained in my March 1, 2020, letter to Committee members, I share your interest in ensuring that the Senate and this Committee not be used to “further disinformation efforts by Russian or other actors,” and have conducted our oversight and investigations fully aware of these efforts. In fact, as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Europe of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I held a hearing on November 3, 2015, titled “Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine and the Propaganda that Threatens Europe.” I understand the threat.

To that end, I have spoken with the intelligence committee and received a classified intelligence product which I have made available to every Committee member. Our staff also received a briefing from the FBI on February 28, 2020. Although the FBI directly and thoroughly answered the staff’s questions, it is clear they were not the answers your staff had hoped to hear. During the call, minority staff asked the FBI to speak further in a classified setting. The FBI unequivocally agreed to meet to answer any additional questions, and told your staff who they could contact to set up that briefing. To my knowledge, your staff never contacted those individuals.

I have been clear that I would receive any information relevant to our work. I met with majority members in a secure setting to address their concerns and review any and all relevant information. I have made the same offer to minority members. Additionally, last week I suggested numerous times for Committee members to meet in a secure setting to discuss your concerns. Unfortunately, I was told that you and the other minority members would not meet any time prior to the business meeting.

As committed as I am to being on guard against the threat posed by our adversaries, I am equally dedicated to not letting foreign actors’ malign actions and intentions be used as a smokescreen to inhibit or interfere with the Committee’s legitimate and important oversight work.

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We have conducted our investigations methodically, responsibly, and largely out of public view. We have gone to great lengths to receive briefings and review and verify all information received by the Committee before making any of it public. In fact, had you not objected to this subpoena, it would have been issued quietly with little public awareness. I gave you my personal assurance that would be the case.

Unfortunately, you did object and continue to use “disinformation efforts by Russia” as a boogie man to justify opposition to this narrow subpoena involving records associated with a U.S.-based lobbying firm. As you know, the lobbying firm is run by former Clinton administration officials, has contacts at the very highest level of the U.S. government, and uses those contacts to try to influence U.S. policy. If you are concerned that records regarding the firm’s work are somehow Russian disinformation, that is all the more reason for this Committee to investigate.

I believe I have been fully briefed and am fully aware of the expressed concerns. Based on that knowledge, this subpoena is justified, required, and narrowly tailored to address any risk of helping disseminate Russian disinformation or “facilitate foreign interference in our 2020 election.”

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Thomas Carper, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Michael Enzi, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Kamala Harris, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Maggie Hassan, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Josh Hawley, U.S. Senator
The Honorable James Lankford, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Rand Paul, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Rob Portman, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Mitt Romney, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Jacky Rosen, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Rick Scott, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema, U.S. Senator