

**Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
September 16, 2020 – Business Meeting**

As prepared for delivery:

We are here today for two reasons: First, to overcome a ridiculous assertion by the Ranking Member regarding committee subpoena rules, and while we're at it, vote for subpoena authority for seven additional individuals based on new information. And second, to vote on the nominations for three members of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board.

Regarding the committee subpoena rules, Senator Peters has raised a procedural objection based on an absurd interpretation of committee rules. According to Senator Peters, when the Committee authorized deposition subpoenas on June 4th, that vote did not include the authority to actually schedule any depositions. But rather than raise this issue internally—which would have been the proper procedure because the Committee, and not any one member, is the arbiter of our rules—Senator Peters instead immediately conveyed that objection to a witness, who then cited it as an excuse to ignore a Committee subpoena.

The witness that Senator Peters encouraged to ignore a Committee Subpoena is former State Department employee, Jonathan Winer. Mr. Winer played a key role in disseminating the Steele dossier to officials within the State Department, which was then further relayed to the FBI. He was also one of only two witnesses who refused to cooperate with the DOJ Inspector General's review. I decided to issue Mr. Winer subpoenas because of concerns about his voluntary cooperation with the Committee. And contrary to the assertions of Ranking Member Peters, those concerns turned out to be well-founded.

As Sen. Grassley and I noted in our September 2019 letter, Mr. Winer used his personal email to conduct official government business. In addition, the day before Senator Peters encouraged Mr. Winer to ignore a Committee subpoena, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) revealed that Mr. Winer admitted to destroying not only all of his correspondence with Christopher Steele, but also “essentially every email” from his tenure at the State Department.

This is the individual that Senator Peters apparently does not want our committee to interview.

This is by no means the only inappropriate meddling by the minority in our investigations. The most recent example was a letter and classified addendum created by senior Democrat leaders that accused Senator Grassley and me of relying on foreign disinformation. This “intelligence product,” which was full of false allegations, was produced, classified and then leaked to the press more than a week before Senator Grassley or I were given access to it. Many in the media dutifully reported this hot tip. Democrats then used these media reports to repeat, distort and embellish the false charges. This coordinated smear culminated in a August 7th opinion piece in the Washington Post submitted by Sen. Richard Blumenthal.

But John Ratcliffe, the Director of National Intelligence, wrote: “I can confirm the IC did not create the classified addendum to the 13 July letter, nor did we authorize its creation. The IC was not consulted prior to its creation and subsequent release to the entire membership of the U.S. House of Representatives ... and by no means reflects the full and complete analysis of the IC.”

The foreign information we were falsely accused of receiving and utilizing purportedly comes from a Ukrainian named Andriy Derkach, who has since been sanctioned by the Treasury Department. Although neither Senator Grassley nor I ever sought, received, or used any information from Mr. Derkach, the media has continued to report otherwise for weeks despite our repeated and unequivocal denials. But it is true that a chart produced by Mr. Derkach is now part of our investigatory record - not because of me or Senator Grassley - but because Senator Peters’ staff introduced it into the record. As was the case in the 2016 election, the only foreign disinformation being used to interfere in this investigation has been introduced by Democrats, not Republicans.

Given all of the concern expressed by Democrats over foreign disinformation, it is notable that we have not heard the same concern over the disclosure that the Steele dossier contained Russian disinformation. We are aware of this fact because my Chief Counsel uncovered it buried in four classified footnotes to the DoJ IG FISA Report. We also know the FBI was aware of this as early as August, 2016, and that the Steele dossier was bought and paid for by the DNC and Clinton campaign. Apparently, Democrats are willing to look the other way when they pay for or use foreign disinformation against Republicans.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal’s smear piece was headlined “The threat to U.S. elections is real, and frightening. The public has a right to know.” I completely agree with the headline, but I utterly reject Senator Blumenthal’s false allegations as I

clarified in my August 10th Open Letter, which I now ask consent to enter into the record. I hope everyone listening will take the time to read this ten page letter that lays out the history, purpose, and goals of our ongoing oversight. I can assure you that if you do, you will learn a lot.

So here we are, forced to take a vote to end the meddling and delay tactics of Senator Peters and the minority regarding our lawful subpoenas. As I have stated repeatedly, and as Senator Blumenthal's headline declares, "The public has a right to know". Our investigation is focused on uncovering and revealing the truth, but Democrats seem intent at every turn to frustrate and interfere with our oversight efforts. Based on their obstructive behavior, one has to wonder, why are they so afraid of the truth?