

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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April 5, 2024

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Comer:

Last week, you and Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan penned a letter to the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) based on “information from a whistleblower” in which you accuse the CIA of obstructing a criminal investigation by the Department of Justice (DOJ) into Hunter Biden by “interven[ing]” to “prevent” a witness interview.¹ This is a serious charge, but you have completely ignored my staff’s requests to be allowed to review the information that you say prompted your letter and upon which your letter is putatively and entirely based. This refusal to share Committee material with the Minority creates the unavoidable implication that this information—like so many self-collapsing precursor tips in this Sisyphean quest for a scandal—cannot withstand even the most cursory scrutiny by the Committee’s Democratic Members.

Please forgive the observation, but I couldn’t help noticing that your accusations against the CIA mirror in striking ways your earlier impassioned claims, also based on whistleblower tips, that the DOJ was “seeking to bury” a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tipsheet that turned out to be a complete tissue of lies.² Indeed, the false allegations against President Biden in that heavily trumpeted fake bombshell exercise were peddled by Alexander Smirnov, an individual replete with extensive ties to Russian intelligence agencies who has been indicted by Special Counsel David Weiss (a prosecutor appointed by then-President Trump and hand-picked to lead the Hunter Biden investigation by then-Attorney General William Barr), for constructing a false record and lying to the DOJ.³

¹ Letter from Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and Chairman Jim Jordan, Committee on the Judiciary, to Director William J. Burns, Central Intelligence Agency (Mar. 21, 2024) (online at <https://judiciary.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/republicans-judiciary.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-03-21%20JDJ%20JC%20to%20CIA.pdf>).

² Senator Chuck Grassley, *Press Release: Grassley Obtains & Releases FBI Record Alleging VP Biden Foreign Bribery Scheme* (July 20, 2023) (online at www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-obtains-and-releases-fbi-record-alleging-vp-biden-foreign-bribery-scheme).

³ Letter from Ranking Member Jamie Raskin, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, to Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Mar. 11, 2024) (online at

In this all-too-familiar pattern, the allegations in your new letter to the CIA are also seemingly connected both to discredited “Trump World” sources and to active foreign propaganda and disinformation efforts.

I write to request that you provide me and my staff with the information referenced in your letter to the CIA, as well as any information regarding involvement by third parties in your decision to make these allegations public. All of this information must be shared with the full Committee so that we can review it, understand whether you took any steps to vet it, and assess whether you are—once again, wittingly or not—making our Committee a party to efforts by malign foreign interests to influence American elections.⁴

Your March 21, 2024, letter to CIA Director William J. Burns claims that the CIA sought to block Special Counsel Weiss’s team from interviewing Hunter Biden’s attorney, Kevin Morris. Although your office has ignored my staff’s requests for access to the information on which your letter purports to rely, these claims seem to directly collide with the statements and testimony of Internal Revenue Service Special Agent Gary Shapley, who testified he had an opportunity to interview Kevin Morris, and of Mr. Morris himself, who told the Committee he cooperated with the investigation, including by talking to the agents assigned to the matter and producing relevant documents.⁵

Even more troubling to me is this suspicious and telling fact: while the American public and media have learned to treat your succession of bombshell duds in this investigation with appropriate skepticism and caution, your letter and its unverified claims were quickly picked up and gleefully amplified by *Sputnik*, a Russian state-funded and state-directed media outlet, which, according to the Department of State, “play[s] an important role within Russia’s disinformation and propaganda ecosystem” by “using the guise of conventional international media outlets to provide disinformation and propaganda support for the Kremlin’s foreign policy objectives.”⁶ A perfectly punctual and unquestioning *Sputnik* article—entitled “CIA Protecting

<https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2023-03-11.Raskin%20to%20Comer%20re%20FD-1023.pdf>); Government’s Application for Review of Magistrate Judge’s Bail Order; Memorandum of Points and Authorities, Exhibits, 7 (Feb. 21, 2024) *United States of America v. Alexander Smirnov, Central District of California* (No. CR 2:24-cr-00091-ODW).

⁴ To the extent that this information includes protected whistleblower disclosures, my staff and I will evaluate it consistent with congressional practices on whistleblower protections, including confidentiality protections. In particular, despite your decision at the beginning of this Congress to abandon the long-standing bipartisan agreement between Committee Republicans and Democrats, my staff and I will abide by the agreement’s whistleblower protocol, including all confidentiality provisions, if applicable.

⁵ Committee on Ways and Means, *Hearing with the IRS Whistleblowers: Hunter Biden Investigation Obstruction in Their Own Words* at 115 (Dec. 5, 2023) (online at https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FINAL_Hearing-Transcript-12.5.2023.pdf); Committee on Oversight and Accountability, Committee on the Judiciary, and Committee on Ways and Means, Transcribed Interview of Kevin Morris at 42, 83 (Jan. 18, 2024) (online at https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/Morris_Redacted.pdf).

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Global Engagement Center, *Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik’s Role in Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* (Jan. 2022) (online at www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Kremlin-Funded-Media_January_update-19.pdf).

Biden by Blocking IRS Interviews, Says Former Whistleblower”—includes direct quotes from and citations to your letter.⁷ Always eager to add fodder to your allegations, *Sputnik*, in its article, also obtained statements supportive of your latest claims from two discredited Trump World figures: Bradley Birkenfeld, a Rudy Giuliani associate deeply involved in peddling allegations about Hunter Biden during the 2020 election; and Keith Ablow, a psychiatrist and former *Fox News* contributor who briefly treated Hunter Biden before his professional license was revoked following allegations that he sexually exploited his own patients.⁸ One can only regard with amazement how quickly *Sputnik* identified these Trump World commentators to support this new story!⁹

So, once again, the Committee’s slapstick and rudderless impeachment voyage—fodder for late night talk show hosts and a factor often cited by observers seeking to explain why so many of your GOP colleagues are resigning their seats in the middle of this historic “do-nothing” Congress—runs aground on the familiar sandbar of Russian propaganda and the well-orchestrated mutterings of discredited and disgraced hangers-on in Trump World. As Lev Parnas, Rudy Giuliani’s former right-hand man, explained in his letter to you last summer and in his riveting testimony before the Committee last month, Russian agents have peddled false corruption allegations against President Biden for years and promoted their active-measure disinformation campaigns through high-ranking Trump World figures, including Mr. Giuliani; John Solomon, a discredited columnist who formerly wrote for *The Hill*; and even pliant Members of Congress, such as Senator Ron Johnson.¹⁰

⁷ *CIA Protecting Biden by Blocking IRS Interviews, Says Former Whistleblower*, Sputnik International (Mar. 23, 2024) (online at <https://sputnikglobe.com/20240323/cia-protecting-biden-by-blocking-irs-interviews-says-former-whistleblower-1117505321.html>).

⁸ *Id.*; see also, e.g., *Giuliani’s Crew of Misfits and Hucksters Storms into the Hunter Biden Wars*, Daily Beast (Oct. 25, 2020) (online at www.thedailybeast.com/rudy-giulianis-crew-of-misfits-and-hucksters-storms-into-the-hunter-biden-wars).

⁹ Just two weeks before your letter, Keith Ablow was also interviewed by Tucker Carlson to discuss his allegations involving Hunter Biden. Tucker Carlson (@TuckerCarlson), X (Mar. 5, 2024) (online at <https://twitter.com/TuckerCarlson/status/1765149038096359446>).

¹⁰ Committee on Oversight and Accountability, Testimony of Lev Parnas, *Hearing on Influence Peddling: Examining Joe Biden’s Abuse of Public Office* (Mar. 20, 2024) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/influence-peddling-examining-joe-bidens-abuse-of-public-office/>); Letter from Lev Parnas to Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Accountability (July 18, 2023) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/Parnas%2C%20COA%20Letter%2C%20July%2018%2C%202023.pdf>); see also, e.g., *Exclusive: How an Accused Russian Agent Worked with Rudy Giuliani in a Plot Against the 2020 Election*, TIME (May 28, 2021) (online at <https://time.com/6052302/andriy-derkach-profile/>) (“In the fall of 2019, [Andrii Derkach] gained access to Trump’s inner circle through Rudy Giuliani, the President’s personal lawyer. He then provided Giuliani with documents purporting to show that Joe Biden and his family were involved in corruption.... Derkach could not have gotten through to American voters without help from Trump and Giuliani, while the Trump campaign’s attacks against the Biden family relied in large part on the ammunition Derkach provided.”); *Exclusive: Putin’s Allies Offered a ‘Back Channel to Key Witness in New Senate Report on the Bidens*, TIME (Sept. 23, 2020) (online at <https://time.com/5892440/senate-gop-biden-report-russia-offer/>) (“Over the past year, Zelenskyy has repeatedly aired his claims about corruption in the Biden family while appearing on Giuliani’s YouTube channel and podcast.... With help from Giuliani, these claims also found their way to the U.S. Senate, where Johnson and his staff have had repeated contacts with Zelenskyy for over a year. The Wisconsin Senator first met with Zelenskyy in July 2019, a month before Johnson teamed up with Senator Grassley to investigate allegations of corruption against the Biden family.”); *Exclusive: Ukraine to Fire*

Of course, Mr. Parnas, an exile from Trump World, is hardly the only voice warning of the Kremlin's efforts to spread divisive and destructive propaganda against Joe Biden and the United States. Under the Trump Administration itself, the Treasury Department issued sanctions in 2020 and 2021 against individuals who were "advancing disinformation narratives that U.S. government officials have engaged in corrupt dealings in Ukraine."¹¹ In January 2021, then-Secretary of State Michael Pompeo issued a statement denouncing Russian-backed individuals who "coordinated dissemination and promotion of fraudulent or unsubstantiated allegations involving a U.S. political candidate" (Joe Biden) and "repeated public statements advancing narratives that U.S. Government officials have engaged in corrupt dealings in Ukraine."¹² And a March 2021 report from the Intelligence Community entitled "Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Election" similarly warned of Moscow's "use of proxies linked to Russian intelligence to push influence narratives—including misleading or unsubstantiated allegations against President Biden[.]"¹³

Prosecutor Who Discussed Bidens with Giuliani—Source, Reuters (Nov. 4, 2019) (online at www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1XE20B/) ("In April, Kulyk gave an interview to the columnist John Solomon at The Hill newspaper in Washington. In that article, Kulyk said he and other prosecutors were investigating allegations concerning Shokin's dismissal. Kulyk told The Hill that Ukrainian officials had unsuccessfully tried to pass on evidence on this and other probes to the U.S. authorities before looking for other people, including Giuliani, to present their findings.").

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Press Release: Treasury Sanctions Russia-Linked Election Interference Actors* (Sept. 10, 2020) (online at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1118>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Press Release: Treasury Takes Further Action Against Russian-Linked Actors* (Jan. 11, 2021) (online at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1232>).

¹² U.S. Department of State, *Press Statement by Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo: Sanctioning Russia-Linked Disinformation Network for Its Involvement in Attempts to Influence U.S. Election* (Jan. 11, 2021) (online at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/sanctioning-russia-linked-disinformation-network-for-its-involvement-in-attempts-to-influence-u-s-election/>).

¹³ National Intelligence Council, *Intelligence Community Assessment: Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections* (Mar. 10, 2021) (online at www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf); see also Committee on Oversight and Accountability, *Press Release: Ranking Member Raskin's Statement Following Review of Debunked FBI Tip* (June 5, 2023) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/pressreleases/ranking-member-raskin-s-statement-following-review-of-debunked-fbi-tip>) ("We now know what I had long suspected: that Chairman Comer's subpoena is about recycling stale and debunked Burisma conspiracy theories long peddled by Rudy Giuliani and a Russian agent, sanctioned by former President Trump's own Treasury Department, as part of the effort to smear President Biden and help Mr. Trump's reelection campaign."); Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, *Election Interference: Majority Investigation Amplifies Russian Attack on 2020 Election* (Sept. 23, 2020) (online at www.hsgac.senate.gov/wpcontent/uploads/imo/media/doc/200923_FullReport_PetersHSGACWydenFinance.pdf) ("The Russian government has encouraged a disinformation campaign against former Vice President Biden. This campaign was already underway in 2015 in response to his anticorruption efforts in Ukraine, and it gained renewed fervor because of his candidacy in the 2020 presidential election"); House Foreign Affairs Committee, *Press Release: Engel Releases Summary of State Department Records Undercutting Senate Republican Smear. Records Reveal Russian Origins of Smear against Former Vice President* (Sept. 23, 2020) (online at <https://democratsforeignaffairs.house.gov/2020/9/engel-releases-summary-of-state-department-records-undercutting-senatorepublican-smear>) ("The documents show that on the evening of December 5, 2015, U.S. Embassy officials in Kyiv noticed articles in Russian-language media highlighting Hunter Biden's role at Burisma and using that to undercut anti-corruption efforts that were being led by Vice President Biden.... [T]he records show this attack had its origin in Russian propaganda, and it was designed to undercut the efforts of Vice President Biden and the entire US government to support anticorruption efforts in Ukraine and prosecution, not leniency, for

Despite this torrent of official warnings and findings about efforts by Russian intelligence services to smear President Biden, you have eagerly and (charitably speaking) naively used our Committee to promote ridiculous allegations rooted in foreign disinformation and propaganda. Notably, time and again, you have also denied the Committee's Democratic Members any opportunity to vet or even review the information you have received, and you have failed to provide any accounting of its sourcing.

Last summer, as you repeatedly appeared on *Fox News* touting information allegedly obtained from whistleblowers, we learned that your star whistleblower-of-the-hour was in fact none other than Gal Luft, a fugitive from American justice who was charged by the DOJ last year with multiple felonies, including conspiring to “advance the interests of the People’s Republic of China” in the United States through an adviser to then-President Trump, illegally trafficking Chinese-manufactured weapons to Iran in exchange for Iranian oil provided to China, and making false statements to federal agents.¹⁴ Rep. Dan Goldman and I wrote to you asking that you “initiate an investigation into whether the Committee may have been unwittingly duped by Mr. Luft in furtherance of the [Chinese Communist Party]’s interests,” and “that you immediately provide Committee Democrats with all materials and information provided by Mr. Luft to the Committee.”¹⁵ Alas, you have thus far completely ignored our request.

Recently, we learned, of course, that the infamous FBI Form 1023 tipsheet you released last year—purportedly after “assess[ing]” it to ensure it contained only “verified and indisputable” facts—was not just a tissue of lies but likely part of a disinformation campaign conducted by Russian intelligence agencies.¹⁶ Notably, you explained that the copy of the Form 1023 you released was provided to you by whistleblowers after you had previously claimed to have “reviewed credible whistleblower disclosures that then-VP Joe Biden allegedly engaged in a bribery scheme with a foreign national.”¹⁷ Referring to the FD-1023 tipsheet as “[t]he FBI’s

Burisma’s Zlochevsky.”).

¹⁴ United States Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York, *Press Release: U.S. Attorney Announces Charges Against Co-Director of Think Tank for Acting as an Unregistered Foreign Agent, Trafficking in Arms, Violating U.S. Sanctions Against Iran, And Making False Statements To Federal Agents* (July 10, 2023) (online at www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-attorney-announces-charges-against-co-director-think-tank-acting-unregistered).

¹⁵ Letter from Ranking Member Jamie Raskin and Representative Dan Goldman, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, to Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Accountability (July 11, 2023) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2023-07-11.JBR%20Goldman%20to%20Comer%20re%20Luft.pdf>); *see also* Letter from Ranking Member Jamie Raskin, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, to Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Apr. 6, 2023) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2023-04-06.JBR%20to%20Comer%20re%20Laptop%20Witnesses%20FINAL.pdf>).

¹⁶ *House Republican News Conference on Hunter Biden Investigation*, C-SPAN (May 10, 2023) (online at www.c-span.org/video/?527960-1/house-republican-news-conference-hunter-biden-investigation).

¹⁷ Senator Chuck Grassley, *Press Release: Grassley Obtains & Releases FBI Record Alleging VP Biden Foreign Bribery Scheme* (July 20, 2023) (online at www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-obtains-and-releases-fbi-record-alleging-vp-biden-foreign-bribery-scheme); Rep. James Comer (@RepJamesComer), X (May 4, 2023) (online at <https://twitter.com/RepJamesComer/status/1654302048530190336>).

Biden Bribery Record,” you claimed without any evidence at all that, “[g]iven the misconduct and politicization at the Department of Justice, the American people must be able to read this record for themselves.”¹⁸ I wrote you last month requesting “a detailed account of what steps you took—if any—to objectively assess the allegations contained in the FBI tipsheet before releasing it ... and any documents and information that reflect the efforts by third parties to encourage or coax you to release the FD-1023 tipsheet publicly.”¹⁹ Yet you have also failed to respond to this request and have not provided any of the information that spurred you to release those spurious allegations.

Meanwhile, the Committee’s otherwise shipwrecked and laughingstock impeachment inquiry has settled into its final starring role on earth: as a highly valued and regularly touted feature event in Russian propaganda and disinformation theater. As the American press from *CNN* to *Fox News* now just ignores or lampoons the pratfalls and antics of this conspiracy theory-riddled voyage to nowhere, *Sputnik* and *RT*—another state-owned and state-directed Russian media outlet that serves as a propaganda and disinformation arm of the Kremlin—have run numerous stories about Hunter Biden and this Committee’s impeachment inquiry, many of which, I am sad to report, directly and generously quote or cite from your own statements and speculations as Chairman.²⁰ We are continuing to waste millions of dollars of American taxpayer money to provide unfounded rumors and gossip tidbits for Russian propaganda outlets promoting lies about our country.

Your March 21 letter looks like yet another episode in the Committee’s gullible campaign to amplify the vacuous claims of shadowy Trump World figures and foreign disinformation and propaganda operators. Your decision to direct your request to the Director of the CIA heightens my concerns about the national security implications of the Committee’s complicity with the anti-Biden “Russian hoax” that has been the driving narrative of your

¹⁸ Senator Chuck Grassley, *Press Release: Grassley Obtains & Releases FBI Record Alleging VP Biden Foreign Bribery Scheme* (July 20, 2023) (online at www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-obtains-and-releases-fbi-record-alleging-vp-biden-foreign-bribery-scheme).

¹⁹ Letter from Ranking Member Jamie Raskin to Chairman James Comer, Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Mar. 11, 2024) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2023-03-11.Raskin%20to%20Comer%20re%20FD-1023.pdf>).


²⁰ For *Sputnik*, see <https://sputniknews.com>; For *RT*, see www.rt.com. What follows are just a handful of examples among the dozens of stories quoting or citing your own statements: *Congressman Comer Says US House Oversight Committee Has Proof of \$200K Payment to Biden*, *Sputnik International* (Oct. 20, 2023) (online at <https://sputnikglobe.com/20231020/congressman-comer-says-us-house-oversight-committee-has-proof-of-200k-payment-to-biden-1114371019.html>); *Biden Took \$40,000 in ‘Laundered Chinese Money’—House Oversight Chair*, *RT* (Nov. 1, 2023) (online at www.rt.com/news/586381-hunter-biden-chinese-money-proof/); *Joe Biden Received ‘Direct Monthly Payments’ from His Son’s Business Entity*, *Sputnik International* (Dec. 4, 2023) (online at <https://sputnikglobe.com/20231204/joe-biden-received-direct-monthly-payments-from-his-sons-business-entity-1115378668.html>); *RT (@RT_com)*, X (July 30, 2023) (online at https://twitter.com/RT_com/status/1685500464941694976/video/1); *RT (@RT_com)*, X (July 19, 2023) (online at https://twitter.com/RT_com/status/1681871551577063424/video/1); see also U.S. Department of State, Global Engagement Center, *Kremlin-Funded Media: RT and Sputnik’s Role in Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* (Jan. 2022) (online at www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Kremlin-Funded-Media_January_update-19.pdf).

The Honorable James Comer
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investigation. I ask that you immediately provide to me and my staff all information in your possession regarding your latest allegation, as well as any documents and information that reflect the involvement of third parties in your decision to make public the allegations in your March 21 letter.

Surely, it is long past time for this Committee—a Committee of the United States Congress whose Members are sworn to uphold the United States Constitution—to stop participating as supporting actors in a Russian disinformation campaign and to put an end to this humiliating impeachment inquiry.

Very truly yours,



Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member