

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Ranking Member Jamie Raskin **Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery** **Contempt Proceeding Against Attorney General Merrick Garland** **May 16, 2024**

Ladies and gentlemen, in this special nighttime episode we resume the madcap comedy mystery series called “Comer’s High Crimes and Misadventures: The Hilarious Quest to Impeach a President Who Has Done Nothing Wrong,” an avowedly low-budget but multi-million dollar taxpayer funded production which most Americans assumed had ended two months ago and everyone had completely forgotten about.

But tonight, with the cast and crew fresh back from a surprise trip to New York City itself, it’s clear the show must go on!

Now, our originally scheduled performance was supposed to be at 11:00 am today but it was postponed when members of the Majority chose to join a mass spiritual pilgrimage to the New York criminal trial of a Florida man, an adjudicated fraudster and rapist, as he faces 34 felony counts of falsifying corporate financial records to cover up \$130,000 paid in hush money to a porn star sex partner.

Although some people are churlishly complaining that Members of the House should actually be here to vote on public business and should not have forced a last-minute change in the Committee schedule, our colleagues properly demonstrated for all of history their fierce devotion to this clearly reformed, devout, and pious Florida spiritual leader who many supporters are calling the Messiah from Mar-a-Lago.

Of course, in the meantime, Chairman Jordan in the House Judiciary Committee preempted our GOP colleagues on Oversight, rendering this exercise not only absurd, but completely meaningless and redundant. They have already held Attorney General Garland purportedly in contempt.

Now, when we last met on this matter, you’ll recall that the Majority still had not identified a single high crime or misdemeanor that the President had committed.

The Committee’s impressive 3.8 million pages of documents and 80 hours of testimony from 20 witnesses produced nothing but overwhelming and definitive proof that President Biden had nothing wrong.

So, desperate for a new story line, Republicans have come up with this astonishing new plot twist: they now propose to hold the Attorney General of the United States in contempt for giving the Committee the information it asked for, and it is information that has absolutely nothing at all to do with their failed impeachment investigation, or any high crimes or misdemeanors.

True fans of the show will recall from prior episodes this plot device of punishing people for complying with Committee orders, but this new episode of not taking yes for an answer sends us off into strange new worlds of absurdity where no Congressional Committee has truly ever gone before.

The Majority wanted to know what President Biden said in his voluntary interview with Special Counsel Hur. Maybe there was an impeachable diamond lurking in the rough. So, the Justice Department complied with the request. It turned over the 250-page transcript of President Biden's 5-hour interview with the Special Counsel. We had a hearing on it, in this Committee. The Special Counsel came, and there was nothing impeachable there. If there had been, you would have taken up Mr. Moskowitz's offer and you would have voted on impeachment after it happened, but you didn't.

Committee Members—and hundreds of millions of Americans—got to read the entire transcript and can read it right now, if they'd like. We all can learn what the President was asked and see how he answered each and every question.

But, the Chairman insists that is not enough. He and the rest of America are clearly able to read the President's entire interview, but he wants to be able to hear the interview. The book isn't sufficient; he wants the audio-book. And because of this gratuitous and comical request, the whole troupe and congregation now seek to hold the Attorney General of the United States in contempt.

Anyone watching can grasp the ridiculous fallacy cleverly tucked into this new special primetime episode. There is plainly nothing relevant or material that our Committee can learn from an audiotape which we cannot learn from the 250 pages of the transcript. The format of the medium does not change the content of the communications.

So, in this absurd twist, our friends now seek to blame the spectacular bellyflop of their own impeachment probe on Attorney General Garland and his sneaky efforts to obstruct the investigation by cooperating with it.

We know what obstruction looks like because the last president specialized in it.

This president agreed to sit down for a voluntary 5-hour interview with the Special Counsel investigating him.

Attorney General Garland turned over the complete 250-page transcript interview—that's not obstruction.

Real obstruction was Trump and his Administration refusing to provide information Congress requested in more than 100 different congressional investigations and inquiries. And I know that pleases the Gentlelady from Georgia.

The last president issued an edict directing federal officials in his Administration to categorically ignore and reject all congressional subpoenas. Do my colleagues remember that? Do they know that? He told them not to cooperate with any federal investigation at all by Congress. And we did not hear a peep from any of them. That was real obstruction.

Real obstruction happened when two members of this Committee, who may be preparing to vote tonight to hold Attorney General Garland in contempt, brazenly refused to comply with subpoenas from the U.S. House Select Committee to investigate the January 6th attack on the United States Capitol, and still have not responded to those subpoenas.

But now, it seems, Mr. Chairman, I just got passed something, that the whole obstruction gimmick may just be a fundraising ploy, which demeans the overwhelming legal integrity and impressive theatrical ambitions of this enterprise. I was just handed a mass fundraising email solicitation for your campaign that you sent out this evening, Mr. Chairman, stating that, “Biden and his advisors are terrified that I will release the recordings, forcing the media and Democrats to answer for the dismal decline of Biden’s mental state. [...] This could be the final blow to Biden with swing voters across the country. [...] The Democrats are pulling out all the stops to stop the bleeding. [...] Signed, James Comer, Chairman, House Oversight Committee.”

No, I must confess my disappointment to be handed this fundraising solicitation, signed by you as Chairman of the House Oversight Committee. I thought that you were serious about the legal enterprise here, and not just another political huckster calling hearings to score cheap political points and to make a buck.

Mr. Chairman, I’d like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the full and complete 250-page transcript of the President’s interview with Special Counsel Hur, which we have now had in our Committee for more than 2 months.

And I know that some people may think this is a big Broadway production now with everybody’s trip to the Big Apple, but it’s high time to close this unhinged series and get back to some semblance of the people’s work. We have the interview transcript—we have the President’s words. There is no basis for this outlandish contempt proceeding which only further disgraces our Committee, along with Judiciary. Accordingly, Mr. Chairman—and since your members to be in such a hurry to be done with this—I move to immediately adjourn these proceedings.

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