

Senate Committee Hearing Leaves a Big Unanswered Question

The seats behind him, reserved for working members of the liberal mainstream media, were curiously empty as Hermitage Capital Management CEO William Browder shared what he knew about the relationships of several of the players in the “Russia Narrative.”

Perhaps that’s because he shared information that poked a number of holes into their conspiracy theories, while establishing there may have been a real conspiracy right under their noses the whole time. You can [click here](#) to read the entire seven-page statement, but here are some of the highlights:

- Initially, Browder and Russian President Vladimir Putin were allies against oligarch corruption—
“When Putin was first elected in 2000 he found that the oligarchs had misappropriated much of the president’s power as well. They stole power from him while stealing money from my investors. In Russia, your enemy’s enemy is your friend, and even though I’ve never met Putin, he would often step into my battles with the oligarchs and crack down on them.
“That all changed in July 2003 when Putin arrested Russia’s biggest oligarch and richest man, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Putin grabbed Khodorkovsky off his private jet, took him back to Moscow, put him on trial and allowed television cameras to film Khodorkovsky sitting in a cage right in the middle of the courtroom. That image was extremely powerful because none of the other oligarchs wanted to be in the same position. After Khodorkovsky’s conviction, the other oligarchs went to

Putin and asked him what they needed to do to avoid sitting in the same cage as Khodorkovsky. From what followed, it appeared that Putin's answer was, 'Fifty per cent' He wasn't saying 50 percent for the Russian government or the presidential administration of Russia, but 50 percent for Vladimir Putin personally. From that moment on, Putin became the biggest oligarch in Russia and the richest man in the world, and my anti-corruption activities would no longer be tolerated."

- This led to a deportation, which was quickly followed by a series of "raids" against Browder's companies in which documents of his investments were seized by government officials—

"I hired the smartest Russian lawyer I knew, a 35-year old named Sergei Magnitsky. I asked Sergei to investigate the purpose of the raids and try to stop whatever illegal plans these officials had.

"Sergei went out and investigated. He came back with the most astounding conclusion of corporate identity theft: the documents seized by the Interior Ministry were used to fraudulently re-register our Russian investment holding companies to a man named Viktor Markelov, a known criminal convicted of manslaughter. After more digging, Sergei discovered that the stolen companies were used by the perpetrators to misappropriate \$230 million of taxes that our companies had paid to the Russian government in the previous year.

"I had always thought Putin was a nationalist. It seemed inconceivable that he would approve of his officials stealing \$230 million from the Russian state. Sergei and I were sure that this was a rogue operation and if we just brought it to the attention of the Russian authorities, the 'good guys' would get the 'bad guys', and that would be the end of the story."

- That was barely the beginning of the story. Magnitsky was arrested, imprisoned and ultimately murdered by Russian jailers. Browder launched a campaign to see

justice, which led to Congress approving The Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, which President Barack Obama signed into law—

“Putin was furious. Looking for ways to retaliate against American interests, he settled on the most sadistic and evil option of all: banning the adoption of Russian orphans by American families.

“This was particularly heinous because of the effect it had on the orphans. Russia did not allow the adoption of healthy children, just sick ones. In spite of this, American families came with big hearts and open arms, taking in children with HIV, Down syndrome, spina bifida and other serious ailments. They brought them to America, nursed them, cared for them and loved them. Since the Russian orphanage system did not have the resources to look after these children, many of those unlucky enough to remain in Russia would die before their 18th birthday. In practical terms, this meant that Vladimir Putin sentenced his own, most vulnerable and sick Russian orphans to death in order to protect corrupt officials in his regime.”

- Putin made the repeal of the Magnitsky Act his top foreign policy priority. In addition to murdering, and attempting to murder other attorneys related to the case, Browder said he has been targeted with both death threats and attempts to arrest him using Interpol. But the Russian government also used its resources to work toward a repeal of the Magnitsky Act through lobbying—

“Who was this group of Russians acting on behalf of the Russian state? Two men named Pyotr and Denis Katsyv, a woman named Natalia Veselnitskaya, and a large group of American lobbyists, all of whom are described below.”

- Through an official non-governmental organization, or NGO, called the Human Rights Accountability Global Initiative Foundation, Browder said there was an effort to shroud their work against the Magnitsky Act with the curtain of working to allow U.S. adoptions of Russian

children once again. We already know about Veselnitskaya's meeting with Donald Trump Jr., but there's another connection to the "Russia Narrative" that hadn't been spoken about publicly until Thursday: "Veselnitskaya, through Baker Hostetler, hired Glenn Simpson of the firm Fusion GPS to conduct a smear campaign against me and Sergei Magnitsky in advance of congressional hearings on the Global Magnitsky Act. He contacted a number of major newspapers and other publications to spread false information that Sergei Magnitsky was not murdered, was not a whistle-blower and was instead a criminal. They also spread false information that my presentations to lawmakers around the world were untrue.

"As part of Veselnitskaya's lobbying, a former Wall Street Journal reporter, Chris Cooper of the Potomac Group, was hired to organize the Washington, premiere of a fake documentary about Sergei Magnitsky and myself. This was one the best examples of Putin's propaganda.

"They hired Howard Schweitzer of Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies and former Congressman Ronald Dellums to lobby members of Congress on Capitol Hill to repeal the Magnitsky Act and to remove Sergei's name from the Global Magnitsky bill."

None of this was reported, as required, under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which was the subject of the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings Wednesday and Thursday. Browder was supposed to testify about these damaging new details Wednesday, but with the Senate engaged in the reconciliation process on the health care bill, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., invoked the obscure "two-hour rule" to postpone his appearance.

Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley was less than pleased about the situation, and made that much clear in his opening remarks Thursday:

“I am disappointed that the Minority invoked the two-hour rule to shut this hearing down before we could hear Mr. Browder’s testimony yesterday. Mr. Browder has traveled from overseas to be here today to testify about the Russians’ efforts to manipulate our government and media. This is an important topic to discuss. If the Democrats are truly serious about getting to the bottom of Russian interference, they should hear him out.”

Browder’s testimony is far from anecdotal. Senate investigators have also heard from human rights activist Thor Halvorssen, who in sworn testimony has outed Fusion GPS’s attempts to undermine Venezuelan corruption investigations. This included:

- “devised smear campaigns,”
- “prepared dossiers containing false information,” and
- “carefully placed slanderous news items.”

Sound familiar? At the same time Fusion GPS was hired to work for the Russians, they also contracted former MI5 agent Christopher Steele to craft his now-infamous dossier on President Donald Trump. Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson, who has been subpoenaed to testify before the committee, is represented by Washington, D.C., power attorney Joshua Levy—a former member of Schumer’s staff.

You may recall Don Jr. and former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort—who, according to the liberal mainstream media, had “shady ties” to the pro-Russian former Ukrainian government—were supposed to testify before the Judiciary Committee alongside Simpson. It was previewed by the media to be a “critical moment” for the Trump presidency.

Now, all of those interviews will take place behind closed doors. And, not a peep of outrage from Democrats.

That’s because, reportedly, Simpson made a demand that he be questioned behind closed doors, and only on the condition he’s

not asked who funded the Steele dossier. We already know it was opposition research, also known as “oppo,” but who funded that dirt-digging expedition is suddenly becoming the most critical question in the “Russia Narrative” investigation.

And Democrats clearly don’t want you to know the answer.

Not too funnily, Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s charge from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein allows his team to fully investigate all of these issues, but we’ve not heard a word about it from his generally free-leaking office at the Department of Justice. But, a group of House Republicans is now seeking to add some balance to the situation.

In a letter addressed to Rosenstein and his boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, all 20 Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee, chaired by Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., are demanding that a second Special Counsel be appointed. They wrote:

We are writing to you to request assistance in restoring public confidence in our nation’s justice system and its investigators, specifically the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). We need to enable these agencies to perform their necessary and important law enforcement and intelligence functions fully unhindered by politics. While we presume that the FBI’s investigation into Russian influence has been subsumed into Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation, we are not confident that other matters related to the 2016 election and aftermath are similarly under investigation by Special Counsel Mueller. The unbalanced, uncertain, and seemingly unlimited focus of the special counsel’s investigation has led many of our constituents to see a dual standard of justice that benefits only the powerful and politically well-connected. For this reason, we call on you to appoint a second special counsel to investigate a plethora of matters connected to the 2016 election and its aftermath, including

actions taken by previously public figures like Attorney General Loretta Lynch, FBI Director James Comey, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Many Democrats and members of the Washington media previously called for a "special prosecutor" to investigate Russian influence on the election and connections with the Trump campaign. Not surprisingly, once you actually made the decision to appoint a special counsel, the calls for further investigations by congressional committees continued, focused on allegations that have heretofore produced no evidence of criminality, despite the fact that over a year has passed since the opening of the original FBI investigation. Political gamesmanship continues to saturate anything and everything associated with reactions to President Trump's executive decisions and reveals the hypocrisy of those who refuse to allow the special counsel's investigation to proceed without undue political influence. It is an unfortunate state of affairs.

Your stated rationale for recommending Director Comey's termination as FBI director was his mishandling of former Secretary Clinton's email investigation and associated public disclosures concerning the investigation's findings. We believe this was the correct decision. It is clear that Director Comey contributed to the politicization of the FBI's investigations by issuing his public statement, nominating himself as judge and jury, rather than permitting career DOJ prosecutors to make the final decision. But many other questions remain unanswered, due to Mr. Comey's premature and inappropriate decision, as well as the Obama Justice Department's refusal to respond to legitimate Congressional oversight. Last week, the Republican Members of this Committee sent a letter to the Justice Department, asking for responses to those unanswered inquiries. These questions cannot, for history's sake and for the preservation of an impartial system of justice, be allowed

to die on the vine.

It is therefore incumbent on this committee, in our oversight capacity, to ensure that the agencies we oversee are above reproach and that the Justice Department, in particular, remains immune to accusations of politicization. Many Congressional entities have been engaged in oversight of Russian influence on the election, but a comprehensive investigation into the 2016 presidential campaign and its aftermath must, similarly, be free of even the suggestion of political interference. The very core of our justice system demands as much. A second, newly-appointed special counsel will not be encumbered by these considerations, and will provide real value to the American people in offering an independent perspective on these extremely sensitive matters.

Our call for a special counsel is not made lightly. We have no interest in engendering more bad feelings and less confidence in the process or governmental institutions by the American people. Rather, our call is made on their behalf. It is meant to determine whether the criminal prosecution of any individual is warranted based on the solemn obligation to follow the facts wherever they lead and applying the law to those facts.

As we referenced above, Democrats and the mainstream media called for a special counsel to be appointed to investigate any Russian influence on President Trump's campaign. Their pleas were answered, but there are many questions that may be outside the scope of Special Counsel Mueller's investigation. This was clear following Mr. Comey's recent testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee on June 8, 2017, which ignited renewed scrutiny of former Attorney General Loretta Lynch and the actions she took to mislead the public concerning the investigation into the Clinton email investigation. Last year, this committee inquired repeatedly about the circumstances surrounding that and

other matters, but our inquiries were largely ignored.

During his testimony, Mr. Comey referenced a meeting on the Phoenix airport tarmac between Ms. Lynch and former President Bill Clinton. Mr. Comey raised concerns about Ms. Lynch's conduct, and questioned her independence, stating:

At one point, the attorney general had directed me not to call it an investigation, but instead to call it a matter, which confused me and concerned me. That was one of the bricks in the load that led me to conclude, 'I have to step away from the department if we're to close this case credibly.'

In addition, in preparing to testify in front of Congress for a September 2015 hearing, Mr. Comey asked Ms. Lynch at the time whether she was prepared to refer to the Clinton investigation as just that, an "investigation." Mr. Comey testified that Ms. Lynch said, "Yes, but don't call it that, call it a matter." Mr. Comey retorted, "Why would I do that?" Ms. Lynch answered, "Just call it a matter." Mr. Comey stated that he acquiesced, but it gave him "a queasy feeling," since it gave him the "impression that the attorney general was trying to align how we describe our work" with how the Clinton campaign was talking about it.

Notwithstanding the fact that the FBI is the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and not the Federal Bureau of Matters, one is hard-pressed to understand why Ms. Lynch directed then-Director Comey to call the Clinton investigation a "matter" unless she intended to use such deceptive language to help wrongly persuade the American people that former Secretary Clinton was not, in fact, the subject of a full-scale FBI investigation, or to otherwise undermine the integrity of the investigation.

Following Director Comey's Senate Intelligence Committee testimony, Senator Dianne Feinstein was asked about the

testimony while appearing on CNN's "State of the Union." Senator Feinstein stated, "I would have a queasy feeling too, though, to be candid with you, I think we need to know more about that, and there's only one way to know about it, and that's to have the Judiciary Committee take a look at that."

We share Senator Feinstein's and Mr. Comey's concerns—specifically, that during the midst of a contentious presidential election, which was already rife with scandal arising from Secretary Clinton's mishandling of classified information, that our nation's chief law enforcement officer would instruct the FBI Director, her subordinate, to mislead the American public about the nature of the investigation. Following Ms. Lynch's directive to downplay the Clinton investigation as a "matter," Director Comey infamously terminated the Clinton investigation, stating, "[a]llthough there is evidence of potential violations of the statutes regarding the handling of classified information, our judgment is that no reasonable prosecutor would bring such a case."

Mr. Comey's testimony has provided new evidence that Ms. Lynch may have used her position of authority to undermine the Clinton investigation. At any other point in history this accusation would entail a shock to the conscience of law abiding Americans who expect a DOJ free of political influence. We only have, however, an investigation into Russian influence on the 2016 election, including any ties to the Trump campaign. To limit our nation's insight into just this this single component of the 2016 election will only cause the special counsel's work to be derided as one-sided and incomplete. The special counsel's work must begin and end unimpeded by political motivations on either side of the aisle. For these reasons, the following points must also be fully investigated – ideally, via a second special counsel. This is imperative to regain the cherished trust

and confidence in our undoubtedly distressed law enforcement and political institutions.

We call on a newly appointed special counsel to investigate, consistent with appropriate regulations, the following questions, many of which were previously posed by this Committee and remain unanswered:

1. Then-Attorney General Loretta Lynch directing Mr. Comey to mislead the American people on the nature of the Clinton investigation;
2. The shadow cast over our system of justice concerning Secretary Clinton and her involvement in mishandling classified information;
3. FBI and DOJ's investigative decisions related to former Secretary Clinton's email investigation, including the propriety and consequence of immunity deals given to potential Clinton co-conspirators Cheryl Mills, Heather Samuelson, John Bentel and possibly others;
4. The apparent failure of DOJ to empanel a grand jury to investigate allegations of mishandling of classified information by Hillary Clinton and her associates;
5. The Department of State and its employees' involvement in determining which communications of Secretary Clinton's and her associates to turn over for public scrutiny;
6. WikiLeaks disclosures concerning the Clinton Foundation and its potentially unlawful international dealings;
7. Connections between the Clinton campaign, or the Clinton Foundation and foreign entities, including those from Russia and Ukraine;
8. Mr. Comey's knowledge of the purchase of Uranium One by the company Rosatom, whether the approval of the sale was connected to any donations made to the Clinton Foundation and what role Secretary Clinton

played in the approval of that sale that had national security ramifications;

9. Disclosures arising from unlawful access to the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) computer systems, including inappropriate collusion between the DNC and the Clinton campaign to undermine Senator Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign;
10. Post-election accusations by the president that he was wiretapped by the previous Administration, and whether Mr. Comey and Ms. Lynch had any knowledge of efforts made by any federal agency to unlawfully monitor communications of then-candidate Trump or his associates;
11. Selected leaks of classified information related to the unmasking of U.S. person identities incidentally collected upon by the intelligence community, including an assessment of whether anyone in the Obama administration, including Mr. Comey, Ms. Lynch, Ms. Susan Rice, Ms. Samantha Power or others, had any knowledge about the "unmasking" of individuals on then candidate-Trump's campaign team, transition team, or both;
12. Admitted leaks by Mr. Comey to Columbia University law professor Daniel Richman regarding conversations between Mr. Comey and President Trump, how the leaked information was purposefully released to lead to the appointment of a special counsel and whether any classified information was included in the now infamous "Comey memos";
13. Mr. Comey's and the FBI's apparent reliance on "Fusion GPS" in its investigation of the Trump campaign, including the company's creation of a "dossier" of information about Mr. Trump, that dossier's commission and dissemination in the months before and after the 2016 election, whether the FBI paid anyone connected to the dossier, and the intelligence sources of Fusion GPS or any person or company working for Fusion GPS

and its affiliates; and

14. Any and all potential leaks originated by Mr. Comey and provide to author Michael Schmidt dating back to 1993.

You have the ability now to right the ship for the American people so these investigations may proceed independently and impartially. The American public has a right to know the facts—all of them—surrounding the election and its aftermath. We urge you to appoint a second special counsel to ensure these troubling, unanswered questions are not relegated to the dustbin of history.