



Permanent Select Committee
on Intelligence
U.S. House of Representatives

May 7, 2020

The Honorable Richard Grenell
Acting Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20511

Dear Acting Director Grenell:

I write to inform you that the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (“Committee”) is making available to the public the transcripts from interviews conducted during the 115th Congress in connection with the Committee’s investigation of Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. election. As you are aware, in November 2018, following a unanimous Committee vote to release the transcripts, the Committee requested that the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (“ODNI”) coordinate a classification review of the transcripts by the Intelligence Community. On May 4, 2020—nearly a year-and-a-half later—ODNI informed the Committee that the requested review was finally complete.

These transcripts add to the public repository of information about Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. election and its efforts to support the presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump. They complement and reinforce the clear findings set forth in the 2017 Intelligence Community Assessment, the Committee’s 2018 Minority “Views,” Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s Report, the criminal indictments obtained by the Special Counsel’s Office, and the bipartisan reports produced by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The released testimony details the Trump campaign’s solicitation and welcoming of Russian interference in the 2016 election, and the extensive contacts, communications, and links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government. Also revealed is the extent to which certain witnesses sought to obstruct the Committee’s investigation to protect President Trump. This obstruction led to the criminal convictions of President Trump’s political advisor, Roger Stone, and his personal attorney, Michael Cohen, as well as the Committee’s criminal referral to the Department of Justice for false statements made by Erik Prince.

So that the record is clear, the excessive delay in ODNI’s completion of the classification review is the direct result of improper political interference by the White House. For over a year, the White House held up the release of the transcripts by insisting on reviewing 11 transcripts for purported White House “equities.” This separate review was sought despite the fact that President Trump did not seek to assert executive or any other privilege during the Committee’s

investigation. But for the White House's improper interference, ODNI would have been able to complete the classification review of—and the Committee would have been able to release—the transcripts over a year ago. Indeed, the White House's recent decision to abandon its demand—without, as you have represented, reviewing the transcripts—is clear evidence of the political gamesmanship in which the White House has engaged.

The Committee consistently rejected the White House's efforts to interfere in the classification review. Allowing the White House, under any circumstances, to claw-back information already in the congressional record, thereby shielding it from public disclosure, would have undermined the separation of powers and established a dangerous precedent. As I explained to then-Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats almost a year ago:

that ODNI has even considered disclosure to the White House of congressional transcripts, which remain Committee property and relate to an investigation that probed the actions of Donald J. Trump himself—before and after he was elected president—and his associates, is disturbing and raises troubling questions about improper White House influence and intrusion into what should be a narrow, apolitical review for classification only.¹

It is appropriate that the White House has now apparently relinquished its improper demand, but deeply troubling that this political interference in the classification review process unnecessarily delayed the transparency that the American public deserves.

In the interest of full transparency, the Committee is also releasing today the correspondence between the Committee, ODNI, and the White House since November 2018 regarding the classification review process. The release of these records will allow the American public to see the lengths to which the White House went to interfere in—and needlessly delay—the classification review process.

The Committee has long maintained that the release of these transcripts is in the public interest. The Committee is grateful for the contribution of Intelligence Community professionals to the classification review—notwithstanding the White House's and your effort to politicize the process. To prevent any further delay in the release of these transcripts, the Committee is not contesting at this time ODNI's redactions to the transcripts. The Committee is, however, concerned that many of the redactions are unduly expansive, serve no national security interest, and/or shield information that the Executive Branch has already declassified or addressed publicly since 2018—including with regard to Russia's intentions towards Donald J. Trump. This is especially the case with respect to the redaction of unclassified information on the grounds that it is Law Enforcement Sensitive (“LES”) or For Official Use Only (“FOUO”).² The

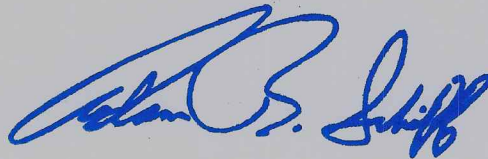
¹ Letter from Adam Schiff, Chairman, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, to Daniel Coats, Director of National Intelligence (June 4, 2019).

² As represented by your office to the Committee, ODNI applied red-colored redactions to the transcripts for the purpose of protecting classified information, and blue-colored redactions to protect unclassified information that it nonetheless deems Law Enforcement Sensitive (“LES”) or For Official Use Only (“FOUO”). The Committee had no role in adjudicating, negotiating, or applying any of these redactions. Separately, the Committee, then led by

Committee expressly reserves the right, consistent with the Rules of the House and its own rules of procedure, to reevaluate and reassess ODNI's proposed redactions. Should the Committee decide to undertake such a review, it is prepared to engage with the Intelligence Community in good faith on the best process for removing any and all unnecessary redactions.

The testimony that the Committee is releasing today serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing threat that Russian interference poses to our democratic process and, specifically, to the 2020 election. It is imperative that the Intelligence Community remain vigilant against this threat, particularly as some individuals in government—wittingly or unwittingly—further the Russian government's interests, including by attempting to whitewash Russia's election interference in 2016, even as Russia seeks to influence this year's election. Political interference has no place in the Intelligence Community, especially when it comes to the vital mission of protecting the integrity of our elections.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
Chairman

Cc: The Honorable Devin Nunes
Ranking Member

Chairman Devin Nunes, applied in November 2017 minimal black-colored redactions to the transcripts to protect Personally Identifiable Information ("PII").