THE NYT'S LEGITIMATE EMAIL DETAIL

The NYT has a long story describing the hack of the Democrats in the most favorable light to the party, one that blames "socialist" Bernie Sanders for the months-long delay before the DNC tech person responded to FBI warnings about being hacked, one that makes no mention of the widely reported detail that Democrats were happy to have an excuse to fire Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

Given that it puts things in a light so favorable to the Democrats, I wanted to look more closely at this passage, which has gotten a lot of attention.

> Hundreds of similar phishing emails were being sent to American political targets, including an identical email sent on March 19 to Mr. Podesta, chairman of the Clinton campaign. Given how many emails Mr. Podesta received through this personal email account, several aides also had access to it, and one of them noticed the warning email, sending it to a computer technician to make sure it was legitimate before anyone clicked on the "change password" button.
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> "This is a legitimate email," Charles Delavan, a Clinton campaign aide, replied to another of Mr. Podesta's aides, who had noticed the alert. "John needs to change his password immediately."
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> With another click, a decade of emails that Mr. Podesta maintained in his Gmail account — a total of about 60,000 — were unlocked for the Russian hackers. Mr. Delavan, in an interview, said that his bad advice was a result of a typo: He knew this was a phishing attack, as the

> campaign was getting dozens of them. He said he had meant to type that it was an "illegitimate" email, an error that he said has plagued him ever since.

It points to a detail that has always struck me about the stories about the hack of John Podesta. They note — as I did — that we can look at the email reportedly used to hack Podesta. Here's the entirety of what Delavan sent to a woman named Sara Latham, who forwarded it to a woman named Milia Fisher:

> This is a legitimate email. John needs to change his password immediately, and ensure that two-factor authentication is turned on his account.
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> He can go to this link: https://myaccount.google.com/security to do both. It is absolutely imperative that this is done ASAP.
>
> If you or he has any questions, please reach out to me at [phone].

It may be that he mistyped legitimate for illegitimate. But he also said that Podesta should change his email password *and added two-factor authentication*. Perhaps the mistake was in forwarding the email with the link, rather than just responding by saying Podesta was being phished.

The part that has always puzzled me about this email — and the likely reason why he's now telling a story that doesn't entirely make sense — is that he also did the safe thing. He provided the real GMail address at which staffers could have changed the password and added 2FA. Had those staffers used *that* link, they could have avoided a whole lot of trouble and made any subsequent hack less likely.

I even, at one point, doubted whether this really could have been the email used to hack Podesta, because it shouldn't have worked, given

that he took the right steps (though the timing of the emails does correlate with the dates of what got released).

What is more likely to have happened is that one of the women used the bad URL to change the password (which would have appeared all shiny in the original), rather than the correct URL that Delavan provided. That is, it may be that Delavan is covering for one of the women.

Update; I realized after posting how the typo thing might make sense, and changed that part, but there's still the point that he did the right thing here.

Update: Slate interviewed Delavan, who said the NYT got the phrasing wrong. The story still doesn't seem to make sense entirely.