RICHARD BURR'S TACIT WARNING TO CHRISTOPHER STEELE

I'm just now catching up to Richard Burr and Mark Warner's press conference on the Russia investigation yesterday. I saw some folks questioning why they did the presser, which surprises me. The answer seems obvious. They did the presser to release and apply pressure from specific areas of the investigation. For example, Burr exonerated those involved in the Mayflower Hotel meetings on April 2016 and further argued that the GOP platform was not changed to let Russia off the hook for Ukraine (I think the latter conclusion, in any case, is correct; I'm less persuaded about the first). Warner used the presser to push for Facebook to release the ads sold to Russia.

A particularly instance of this — one that I believe has been misunderstood by those who've reported it thus far — pertains to the Steele dossier. Here's what Burr said about it, working off of prepared remarks (meaning issuing this tacit warning was one purpose of the presser; after 16:00):

> As it relates to the Steele dossier: unfortunately the committee has hit a wall. We have on several occasions made attempts to contact Mr. Steele, to meet with Mr. Steele, to include, personally, the Vice Chairman and myself as two individuals, of making that connection. Those offers have gone unaccepted. The committee cannot really decide the credibility of the dossier without understanding things like who paid for it? who are your sources and sub-sources? We're investigating a very expansive Russian network of interference in US elections. And though we have been incredibly enlightened at our ability to rebuild backwards, the

> Steele dossier up to a certain date, getting past that point has been somewhat impossible. And I say this because I don't think we're going to find any intelligence products that unlock that key to pre-June of '16. My hope is that Mr. Steele will make a decision to meet with either Mark and I or the committee or both, so that we can hear his side of it, versus for us to depict in our findings what his intent or what his actions were. And I say that to you but I also say that to Chris Steele.

People seem to interpret this to mean SSCI hasn't been able to corroborate the dossier — a point on which Burr is ambiguous. He references intelligence products that might unlock secrets of the dossier, which might suggest the committee *has* found intelligence products from later in the process that either confirms or doesn't the events as the dossier as produced.

More important, however, is his reference to June 2016. While it *seems* like Burr might be suggesting the committee has found *no* evidence on collusion dating to before that date, that would seem to be inconsistent with the committee having received information on Michael Cohen's discussions of financial dealings from before June (though given Burr's exoneration of the Mayflower attendees, he may deem the earlier activities to be inconclusive).

So it seems more likely Burr raised the June 2016, along with his question about how paid for the report, to suggest he has real questions about whether its findings served as a partisan effort to taint Trump, paid for by a still undisclosed Hillary backer.

If Christopher Steele won't talk about what intelligence he had on Trump before the time when, in June 2016, he reported on Russia providing kompromat (though not, at that point, hacked emails) on Hillary to Trump's team, Burr

seems to be saying, then it will be far easier to question his motivations and the conclusions of the report. And frankly, given some of the details on the Steele dossier — especially Steele's briefings to journalists and his claim that the customers for the brief never read it — Burr is right to question that.

In other words, one point of the presser, it seems to me, was for Burr to warn Steele that his dossier will not be treated as a credible piece of work unless and until the committee gets more details about the background to it.

Update: Apparently, Steele responded to Burr's comments by informing the committee he *is* willing to meet with Burr and Warner.