

THE LATEST CNN SCOOP DOESN'T PROVE WHAT EVERYONE SAYS IT DOES

CNN has a story that reports something the evidence it presents doesn't support, which others are taking to say things that it supports even less.

It claims that a short email thread it shares and five pages of talking points it doesn't prove that the June 9, 2016 meeting at Trump Tower between Natalia Veselnitskaya and Don Jr (and others) "not about dirt on Clinton."

An email exchange and talking points provided to CNN are the latest indication of how some of the meeting participants plan to make their case about why the meeting with Donald Trump Jr. did not amount to collusion between Russian officials and the Trump campaign.

The new information stands in contrast with the initial email pitching the meeting to Trump Jr., which promised damaging information on Clinton.

The "proof" is an email chain – or perhaps, just five emails from a longer chain, out of context with other emails they relate to – that includes one where Veselnitskaya asks Rod Goldstone, who set up the meeting, permission to include Rinat Akhmetshin in the meeting because he "is working to advance these issues with several congressmen." From that, CNN suggests, we should understand the meeting was primarily about the Magnitsky sanctions.

But even there, Goldstone's references to the purpose of the meeting are oblique, wishing only that Veselnitskaya "bring[s] whoever you need in

order to make the meeting successful.” Moreover, the talking point document that CNN doesn’t share does include “a passing reference to a possible financier of Clinton’s campaign.” The further discussion of the talking points suggest it was more than a passing reference.

As part of her explanation, Veselnitskaya’s talking points accuse the “Ziff brothers” – three billionaire brothers who had run a hedge fund company together – of violating Russian law, as well as their connections to Democratic politics.

“Ziff brothers participated in financing both Obama presidential campaign, American press dubs them as ‘main sponsors of Democrats,’ ” the memo states, according to a translated version. “It’s entirely possible they also take part in financing Hillary Clinton’s campaign.”

Now consider the provenance of the document, which to me is a big part of the story.

It was obtained, CNN explains, by an attorney CNN says represents Aras and Emin Agalarov, and who seems intent on refuting the story publicly told by Rod Goldstone.

The documents were provided by Scott Balber, who represents Aras and Emin Agalarov, the billionaire real estate developer and his pop star son who requested the June 2016 meeting.

Balber, who went to Moscow to obtain the documents from Veselnitskaya, said in an interview with CNN that the emails and talking points show she was focused on repealing the Magnitsky Act, not providing damaging information on Clinton.

The message was muddled, Balber said, when it was passed like a game of

telephone from Veselnitskaya through the Agalarovs to Goldstone.

Balber also suggested that Goldstone “probably exaggerated and maybe willfully contorted the facts for the purpose of making the meeting interesting to the Trump people.”

A couple of points about this.

First, in addition to apparently representing the Agalarovs in this matter, and on top of being an early source for details about who attended this meeting, Balber also once represented Trump.

This story comes at a time when we know Akhmetshin has already testified before the grand jury, presumably saying what he said to the FT about Veselnitskaya sharing information developed with the help of corporate intelligence (which is quite likely to be Fusion! which might explain the NDA) on how bad money supported Hillary.

Akhmetshin said he did not read the papers about Hillary Clinton’s campaign funding that Veselnitskaya took to the meeting, but he had seen the Russian version of it before. He says the lawyer developed it with the help of private corporate intelligence and that it was about “how bad money ended up in Manhattan and that money was put into supporting political campaigns”.

Furthermore Richard Burr, last week, suggested that Veselnitskaya may have already met with SSCI investigators.

Sir, is the Russian lawyer who met Donald Trump, is she coming before you?

[snip]

Is the Russian attorney going to come through, the Russian attorney that met

with Donald Trump Jr, she's offered to come in open committee. Have you reached out to her, is she one of the 25 on your list?

Burr: How do you know we haven't already heard from her?

So if this is an attempt to change the spin of the story, it may extend no further than changing the spin of the story publicly, not with Robert Mueller or anyone who matters.

But here's the bigger question. Why would an American lawyer who has previously represented Trump need to *fly to Russia* to meet with Veselnitskaya personally? This email chain and the talking points could very easily be sent – but weren't. So why did Balber need to solidify stories with Veselnitskaya in person? And what is the provenance of the emails as presented, stripped of any forensic information?

So while it's clear Trump's former lawyer wants to change the spin around this story, it seems to me the takeaway should be,

***Breaking: Lawyer
with past ties to
Trump flew to
Russia to
coordinate stories
with Natalia
Veselnitskaya***

Furthermore, given all the focus on Fusion and the emphasis in this story on NDAs, I'd suggest it possible they're trying to hide the fact that Fusion was working both sides, or even providing dirt on Hillary to the initial funder of the Steele dossier to the Republican that originally paid for it.

Update: Compare this effort to rewrite the story

with the flip-flop Don Jr made for his congressional testimony. Not only did Don Jr need to incorporate both adoptions and dirt on Hillary to accord with both his published emails but also with what Pops said, but he could not recall things about what Agalarov said in advance of the meeting.

I'm more interesting in the things the forgetful 39 year old could not recall. While his phone records show he spoke to Emin Agalarov, the rock star son of Aras Agalarov, who has been dangling real estate deals in Russia for the Trumps for some time, for example, he doesn't recall what was discussed.

Three days later, on June 6th, Rob contacted me again about scheduling a time for a call with Emin. My phone records show three very short phone calls between Emin and me between June 6th and 7th. I do not recall speaking to Emin. It is possible that we left each other voice mail messages. I simply do not remember.

This is important, because those conversations probably explained precisely what was going to happen at that meeting (and how it might benefit real estate developer Aras Agalarov), but Jr simply can't recall even having a conversation (or how long those conversations were).

Don Jr also claimed not to recall that Ahkmetshin attended the meeting. The focus in the CNN spin on the NDAs served to obscure his presence in a way.