

THE “INSURANCE” TEXT EXPLAINED: A DEBATE ON HOW URGENTLY TO INVESTIGATION TRUMP’S RUSSIAN TIES

WSJ has the fascinating explanation for Peter Strzok’s August 15, 2016 “insurance” text that Republicans have been spinning into a grand scandal. Effectively, Strzok and Lisa Page were debating about how aggressively FBI should investigate Trump’s Russian ties. Page figured they could do so deliberately, and therefore avoid any risk they’d burn sources, because he wasn’t going to win. Strzok disagreed, arguing they had to investigate more aggressively in case he did win.

The text came after a meeting involving Ms. Page, Mr. Strzok and FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, according to people close to the pair and familiar with their version of events. At the meeting, Ms. Page suggested they could take their time investigating the alleged collusion because Mrs. Clinton was likely to win, the people said.

If they move more deliberately, she argued, they could reduce the risk of burning sensitive sources.

Mr. Strzok felt otherwise, according to these people.

His text was meant to convey his belief that the investigation couldn’t afford to take a more measured approach because Mr. Trump could very well win the election, they said. It would be better to be aggressive and gather evidence quickly, he believed, because some of Mr. Trump’s associates could land administration jobs and it was important

to know if they had colluded with
Russia.

The investigation is telling for a number of reasons.

First, the comments came after just 7 of the 17 dossier reports – even assuming FBI got two reports dated August 10 immediately. Many of the most inflammatory ones – notably all the ones involving Michael Cohen – came after this. As WSJ notes, the text also comes four days after another Strzok one, dated August 11, exclaiming, “OMG I CANNOT BELIEVE WE ARE SERIOUSLY LOOKING AT THESE ALLEGATIONS AND THE PERVASIVE CONNECTIONS.” That’s probably not the dossier per se. But it may well be Paul Manafort’s burgeoning scandal; Manafort would resign August 19.

I’m also interested in how this plays with the report that Trump was warned Russians – and other countries – would try to infiltrate his campaign. The report is not that newsworthy; this kind of briefing is routine. But I wonder whether it’s coming out because the timing is of interest – perhaps in conjunction with Strzok’s increasing panic. I even wonder whether Strzok participated in the briefing.

All of which is to say that on this matter, Strzok and Page were not in agreement. Indeed, the text is actually a work debate about the tradeoff of guarding sources and methods and the urgency of excluding any compromised figures from joining Trump’s government.