

FEINSTEIN'S HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

While Devin Nunes has been getting all the headlines for trying to muck up the Mueller investigation, Chuck Grassley and Dianne Feinstein are increasingly at odds, as well. First there was the Grassley-Lindsey Graham bogus referral of Christopher Steele (I say it's bogus not because I doubt his sworn statements have been inconsistent – they have been – but because FBI doesn't need a referral for statements made to FBI itself). Then Feinstein released, and then apologized for, releasing the Glenn Simpson transcript. Grassley used that to invent the story that Jared Kushner was spooked and so wouldn't sit for an interview with the Senate Judiciary Committee (we know that's bullshit because Kushner released his own statement before giving it to the Senate Intelligence Committee, which “spooked” Richard Burr). Still, in response to a Sheldon Whitehouse and Richard Blumenthal request that Don Jr's transcript be shared with FBI (because he likely lied in it), Grassley suggested he'd release the transcripts of all the interviews pertaining to the June 9 meeting.

So now both are continuing to collect evidence on their own, at least in part to generate headlines rather than investigative leads. But the most recent requests, both sent out yesterday, provide some insight into what they believe might have happened and what they know (or still don't know).

In this post, I'll look at whom Feinstein is requesting information from. In a follow-up I'll comment on Grassley's latest request.

Who Feinstein wants to

talk to and who represents them

Some of Feinstein's requests are immediately understandable, including the following people (throughout this post, I've noted the lawyer's name if the letter was sent to one):

- Steve Bannon (sent care of William Burck)
- Mark Corallo (apparently addressed to him personally, even though Victoria Toensing and Joseph diGenova are reportedly representing him)
- Corey Lewandowski (Peter Chavkin)
- Don McGahn (addressed to William Burck – compare with Bannon's letter)
- Stephen Miller (addressed to him at the White House)
- Sergei Millian (sent via email to him directly; see this post for context)
- Sean Spicer (Christopher Mead)

As for the others, the explanation for why the Committee is seeking information explains any connection understood to the investigation. Most of this is open source information to footnoted reporting (click through to see those sources). Where that's not the case, I've bolded it, as that presumably reflects still classified information the Committee received.

Michael Caputo (Dennis Vacco):

I You joined the presidential campaign of

Donald Trump as a communications advisor upon the recommendation of Paul Manafort, and it has been reported you have close ties to campaign advisor Roger Stone. It also has been reported that you have deep ties to Russia, including having worked for the Kremlin and Russian energy conglomerate Gazprom.

Paul Erickson (sent to him directly):

In May 2016, you were involved in efforts to broker a meeting between Alexander Torshin – someone you described as “President Putin’s emissary” – and top officials for the Trump campaign. In your communications with the Trump campaign about this meeting, you said that you had been “cultivating a back-channel to President Putin’s Kremlin” and that the “Kremlin believes that the only possibility of a true reset in this relationship would be with a new Republican White House.”

Robert Foresman (sent to him directly):

As a long-time investment banker in Russia, you have developed relationships with senior Kremlin officials and have expressed your passion for private diplomacy to help foster improved U.S.-Russia relations. The Committee has reason to believe you sought to engage the Trump campaign in discussions concerning outreach from senior Kremlin officials.

Rhona Graff (Alan Futerfas, who is also representing Don Jr):

As a senior vice president in the Trump Organization and longtime assistant to Donald Trump, you are likely familiar with the President’s communications and schedule, particularly during the 2016

presidential campaign. For example, Roger Stone and Paul Manafort, [sic] have said they contact you to get access to President Trump. And when Rob Goldstone emailed Donald Trump Jr. about setting up the June 9, 2016 meeting between the Trump campaign and a Russian lawyer, he noted, "I can also send this info to your father via Rhona, but it is ultra sensitive so wanted to send to you first."

Philip Griffin (sent directly to his email):

You have been a longstanding associate of former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and served, reportedly at his request, as an advisor to the Trump campaign during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in July 2016.

[snip]

You have been a longtime of [sic] associate of Manafort, and you hired Konstantin Kilimnik [sic] to work with you and Manafort in Ukraine. In 2014, you were named in a lawsuit filed by Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska as a "ley" partner, along with Manafort, Gates, and Kilimnik, in an investment fund that Deripaska contends stole nearly \$19 million from him. In 2016, while Manafort was serving as the Trump campaign manager, Kilimnik reportedly emailed Manafort about reporting on Manafort's role in the campaign with Deripaska, which Manafort suggested might be used to "get whole."

David Keene (sent directly to him):

In spring 2016, Russian banker Alexander Torshin and Russian national Maria Butina were reportedly involved in efforts to arrange a meeting between Mr. Torshin and then-candidate Donald Trump

or his campaign. Mr. Torshin is a “senior Russian official who claimed to be acting at the behest of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.” Ms. Butina is the founder of the Russian group known as the Right to Bear Arms and has described herself as a “representative of the Russian Federation” and a “connection between Team Trump and Russia.” You reportedly were introduced to Mr. Torshin in 2011, and were invited by Mr. Torshin and Ms. Butina to speak at the 2013 annual meeting in Moscow for the Right to Bear Arms. Ms. Butina was your guest at the NRA’s 2014 annual meeting, and you traveled along with Trump campaign surrogate Sheriff David Clarke to Moscow in December 2015 for another meeting with Ms. Butina’s organization.

Joseph Keith Kellogg, Jr. (sent directly to him):

As a member of the Trump campaign’s foreign policy team, you worked alongside George Papadopoulos and Carter Page, both of whom had multiple contacts with Russian officials (or their surrogates) that they reported back to the campaign. You also worked on the Trump transition team before joining the National Security Council and served as Chief of Staff under Lt. General Michael Flynn until his removal.

[snip]

You served as Chief of Staff on the National Security Council during the period when General Flynn lied to administration officials about his Russian contacts. It has been reported that, once the White House learned of those lies from Acting Attorney General Sally Yates, you started participating in the President’s daily security

briefings, and – once General Flynn was removed – you served as the President’s interim national security advisor.

John Mashburn (sent to him at the White House):

As the Trump campaign policy director, you worked alongside members of the foreign policy team who had multiple contacts with Russian officials (or their surrogates). For example, Rick Dearborn, another senior policy aide, who reportedly shared a May 2016 request from Alexander Torshin, a senior Russian official with close ties to Vladimir Putin, to meet then-candidate Trump or other top campaign officials at the National Rifle Association’s 2016 annual convention. It also has been reported that JD Gordon informed you about pro-Russian changes to the Republican party platform that were championed by the Trump campaign. Your role as senior advisor on the transition team, and now White House Deputy Cabinet Secretary, also has given you a firsthand look at other significant events affecting the Trump administration, including the removals of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn and FBI Director James Comey.

Frank Mermoud (sent via email directly to him):

You served as an advisor to the Trump campaign during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in July 2016, running the program for ambassadors and foreign delegations – a post that you reportedly held at the recommendation of former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort. Because of your role at the convention, longstanding relationship with Mr. Manafort, and deep business ties to Ukraine,

Amanda Miller (Alan Futerfas, who also represents Don Jr):

As a vice president for marketing at the Trump Organization, you are likely intimately familiar with President Donald Trump and the inner workings of the Trump Organization. For example, you have made public statements on behalf of the Trump Organization regarding the Trump Organization's efforts to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. In addition, the Committee has reason to believe that you may have information on other Trump business ties to Russia.

Feinstein wants to know who lied to David Ignatius

In general, the items requested are not the surprising. I am, however, interested that Kellogg, Miller, and Spicer were asked about,

All communications concerning the story written by David Ignatius that appeared in the Washington Post on January 12, 2017, titled, "Why did Obama dawdle on Russia's hacking?"

Note, before the story, the transition team did not comment, but after it revealed that Flynn had phoned Sergei Kislyak several times on December 29, two aides called Ignatius and told what we now know are lies.

The Trump transition team did not respond Thursday night to a request for comment. But two team members called with information Friday morning. A first Trump official confirmed that Flynn had spoken with Kislyak by phone, but said the calls were before sanctions were announced and didn't cover that topic. This official later added that Flynn's

initial call was to express condolences to Kislyak after the terrorist killing of the Russian ambassador to Ankara Dec. 19, and that Flynn made a second call Dec. 28 to express condolences for the shoot-down of a Russian plane carrying a choir to Syria. In that second call, Flynn also discussed plans for a Trump-Putin conversation sometime after the inauguration. In addition, a second Trump official said the Dec. 28 call included an invitation from Kislyak for a Trump administration official to visit Kazakhstan for a conference in late January.

Burck's clients get different treatment

Also as I noted above, Feinstein staff treated the letter to the two William Burck clients differently. Bannon's was sent to him, but *care of* Burck.

Mr. Stephen Bannon
c/o William Burck
Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP
777 6th Street NW, 11th floor
Washington, D.C. 20001

But McGahn's was addressed to Burck.

William Burck
Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP
777 6th Street NW, 11th floor
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Burck:

We are writing to you as counsel for Donald F. McGahn II. We believe that Mr. McGahn has information that would assist the Committee in its investigation related to Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and the dismissals of Lt. General Flynn and Director Comey and are writing to request documents and schedule an interview with your client in February 2018.

Unless I missed it, McGahn's is the only letter treated this way. Which is one reason I suspect the blizzard of stories about what a hero McGahn was in June after he had done clearly

obstructive things in May and earlier may have more to do with McGahn's legal jeopardy than Trump's.

Update: This Politico piece (h/t PINC) says that McGahn hired Burck last May, right after he had done some really stupid things with respect to the Jim Comey firing.

McGahn came calling in May amid the fallout from Trump's decision to fire Comey from his post as FBI director – an explosive move that prompted Mueller's appointment.