JAMES COMER'S TWITTER HEARING CONFIRMED DONALD TRUMP'S CENSORSHIP ATTEMPT AND MATT TAIBBI'S "CENSORSHIP" ABOUT IT

"When did these guys drink the Kool-Aid, and who served it to them?" the NYT quoted Bob Luskin as saying of John Durham and Bill Barr in last month's blockbuster, revealing scandalous new details about the Durham investigation.

The answer is clear: both men had pickled in conspiracy theories floated on Fox News, and several specific investigative prongs were laundered through a Mark Meadows House "investigation" and a Lindsey Graham Senate one, to be picked up by Durham as if formally referred.

One of the most alarming disclosures in the NYT blockbuster on the Durham investigation, for example, was that after the Italians provided a tip about Trump's criminal exposure on a junket that Barr and Durham took together in 2019, someone leaked to the press that a criminal investigation into *others*, not Trump, had been opened.

The trip to Italy about came after George Papadopoulous aired conspiracy theories — suspicions he *explicitly* attributed to right wing outlets, not his own personal knowledge — in a House Oversight hearing.

> [T]he belief that got Bill Barr to fly to Italy — that Mifsud actually works for Western, not Russian, intelligence — Papadopoulos cited to a Daily Caller article which itself relayed claims

Mifsud's Russian-backed lawyer made he had read the day before.

> Q Okay. So, and Mifsud, he presented himself as what? Who did he tell you he was?
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> A So looking back in my memory of this person, this is a mid-50's person, describes himself as a former diplomat who is connected to the world, essentially. I remember he was even telling me that, you know, the Vietnamese prime minister is a good friend of mine. I mean, you have to understand this is the type of personality he was portraying himself as.
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> And, you know, I guess I took the bait because, you know, usually somebody who – at least in Washington, when somebody portrays themselves in a specific way and has credentials to back it, you believe them. But that's how he portrayed himself. And then I can't remember exactly the next thing that happened until he decided to introduce me to Putin's fake niece in London, which we later found out is some sort of student. But I could get into those details of how that all started.
>
> Q And what's your – just to kind of jump way ahead, what's your current understanding of who Mifsud is?
>
> A My current understanding?
>
> Q Yeah. A You know, **I don't want to espouse conspiracy theories because, you know, it's horrifying to really think that they might be true, but just yesterday, there was a report in the Daily Caller from his own lawyer that he was working with the FBI when he approached me**.

> And when he was working me, I guess – I don't know if that's a fact, and I'm not saying it's a fact – I'm just relaying what the Daily Caller reported yesterday, with Chuck Ross, and it stated in a categorical fashion that Stephan Roh, who is Joseph Mifsud's, I believe his President's counsel, or PR person, said that Mifsud was never a Russian agent.
>
> In fact, he's a tremendous friend of western intelligence, which makes sense considering I met him at a western spying school in Rome. And all his interactions – this is just me trying to repeat the report, these are not my words – and when he met with me, he was working as some sort of asset of the FBI. I don't know if that's true or not. I'm just reporting what my current understanding is of this individual based on reports from journalists.
>
> [snip]
>
> Q And then at what point did you learn that, you know, he's not who he said he was?
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> A Like I said, I don't have the concrete proof of who this person is. **I'm just going with reports**. And all I can say is that I believe the day I was, my name was publicly released and Papadopoulos became this person that everyone now knows, Mifsud gave an interview to an Italian newspaper. And in this newspaper, he basically said, I'm not a Russian agent. I'm a Clinton supporter. I'm a Clinton Foundation donor, and that – something along those lines. I mean, **don't quote me exactly, you could look up the**

> **article yourself. It is in La Republica**. And then all of a sudden, after that, he disappears off the face of the planet, which I always found as odd.
>
> [snip]
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> I guess the overwhelming evidence, **from what I've read, just in reports**, nothing classified, of course, because I'm not privy to anything like that, and considering his own lawyer is saying it, Stephan Roh, that Mifsud is a western intelligence source. And, I guess, **according to reports yesterday**, he was working with the FBI

Less than a year after this testimony, Barr and Durham were flying off to Italy together to chase down Papadopoulos' feverish imaginings.

It's not that Barr and Durham believed Papadopoulos to be credible; Durham never interviewed the Coffee Boy, not even to assess Sergei Millian's credibility before indicting Igor Danchenko based on Millian's hearsay claims. But they nevertheless chased that clear conspiracy theory all the way to Italy together.

The Congressional hearing — a hearing that didn't even incorporate Papadopolous' own emails, which would have made it harder for the convicted liar to sustain a number of the claims he made — served as a way to legitimize what were obviously rewarmed frothy rants. The hearing was a messaging vehicle that served to legitimize garbage claims. Had the press called this out as a circus in real time, it might have forestalled some of Barr and Durham's own stunts.

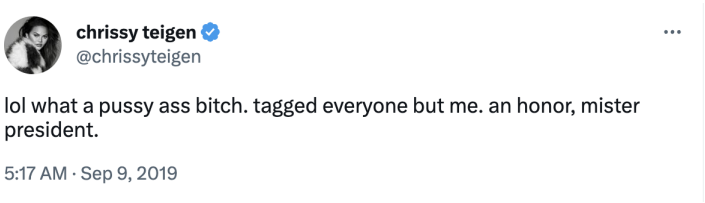
The same is happening again, with the multiple "investigations" pitched by the new GOP-led House. And much of the press is playing along again, treating the hearings as both-sides

disputes about the truth, rather than clear efforts to mainstream conspiracy theories that supplant any hold on the truth.

Consider James Comer's hearing with former Twitter executives (video, transcript), a hearing called in response to Matt Taibbi's sloppy rants about files selectively released by Elon Musk, the same kind of conspiracy theories floated during the Russian investigation by right wing outlets and then legitimized by Congressional hearings.

The finding of Comer's hearing is clear: the witnesses all rebutted any claim that government influence drove the decision to throttle the NYPost report on a laptop that Rudy Giuliani claimed belonged to Hunter Biden. The hearing exposed that the claimed basis for legislative interest in Twitter's actions was baseless. That should been the headline: James Comer's conspiracy theory flopped. James Comer exposed, wasting taxpayer dollars.

Worse still for the Congressman from Kentucky, witness testimony revealed just one instance of the federal government affirmatively asking that content be taken down, just one instance of censorship. That demand came from Donald Trump.



As Twitter whistleblower Anika Navaroli explained in response to a Gerry Conolly question, when Chrissy Teigen responded to a Trump attack on her by calling him a, "pussy ass bitch," the White House asked Twitter to take the tweet down.

> Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA):
>
> Okay. On September 8th, 2019 at 11:11 PM Donald Trump heckled two celebrities on Twitter. John Legend and his wife, Chrissy Teigen, and referred to them as

> the musician, John Legend and his filthy mouthed wife, Ms. Teigen responded to that email at 12:17 AM and according to notes from a conversation with you, Ms. Navaroli's counsel, your counsel, the White House almost immediately thereafter contacted Twitter to demand the tweet be taken down. Is that accurate?
>
> Anika Collier Navaroli:
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> Thank you for the question. In my role, I was not responsible for receiving any sort of request from the government. However, what I was privy to was my supervisors letting us know that we had received something along those lines or something of a request. In that particular instance, I do remember hearing that we had a request from the White House to make sure that we evaluated this tweet and that they wanted it to come down because it was a derogatory statement directly towards the President.
>
> Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA):
>
> They wanted it to come down. They made that request.
>
> Anika Collier Navaroli:
>
> To my recollection, yes.

Daily Beast was one of the few outlets that reported, accurately, that the hearing showed the opposite of what Republicans claimed: in fact, *Trump* had been the one to use government power to attempt to silence speech on Twitter. Rolling Stone reported on another pathetic detail from Comer's hearing, when Byron Donalds got Yoel Roth to explain what was implicit in all of Chairman Comer's discussions of the scope of the hearing: Republicans were complaining that Twitter took down nonconsensual dick pics of Hunter Biden, some posted as part of a

campaign by Steve Bannon associate Guo Wengui.

Comer’s premise was shattered by a “pussy ass bitch” retort and dick pics. That’s the weight of James Comer’s chairmanship. And with it should go the credibility of Taibbi’s consistently shoddy rants.

Five times since then, Taibbi has complained that his own silence about Twitter’s coddling of Trump was exposed in the hearing. In none of those complaints did he issue a correction.

Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi · Feb 8

I reported in #TwitterFiles 1 there had been requests from the Trump White House.

Then we showed agencies like the FBI sent spreadsheets with thousands of names at a time. And Adam Schiff's office asked that ALL SEARCHES of his office be blocked.

But sure, Chrissy **Teigen**.

1,010 3,920 22.6K 2.6M Tip

Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi · 4h

Also: if the "reputable" media is going to make a capital case out of Chrissy **Teigen** but completely ignore proof that, say, Trump was being "visibility filtered" before the 2020 election, why should I take any press criticisms seriously?

72 354 2,506 58.3K Tip

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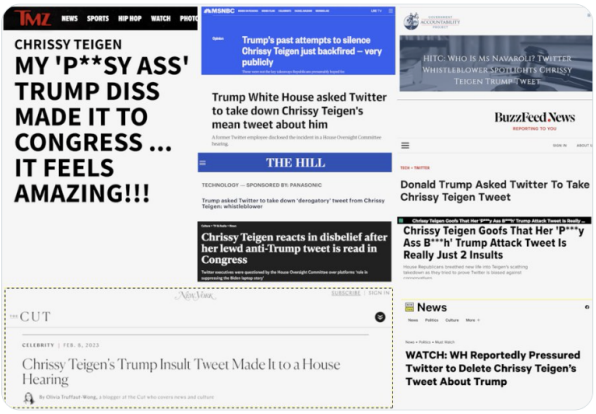
Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi · Feb 19

4. Then House hearings were held last week, at which one witness told a story about Donald Trump asking to remove a mean tweet by Chrissy **Teigen**.

The press went bananas. Now THAT was big news!



169 1,719 10.3K 891.8K Tip

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Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi · Feb 19

13. The fact that mainstream outlets ignored the Schiff story but howled about **Teigen** shows what they're about. Responses like this are designed to keep blue-leaning audiences especially focused on moronic partisan spats, obscuring bigger picture narratives.

121 2,970 14.1K 562.8K Tip

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Matt Taibbi @mtaibbi · Feb 19

Replying to @Prism_Metanews

(2/2) I already know the company has far stronger ties with one party. There isn't a big difference knowing Trump whined about Chrissy **Teigen** and knowing Trump generally whined, i.e. what I reported. I'd rather spend my time searching unknowns that matter, re FBI, GEC, CIA, etc.

Indeed, in his responses, Taibbi repeated several of his lies, obscuring that those FBI spreadsheets he complained about were part of an FBI effort to protect voting rights or that a request that a CIA colleague get an invite to a publicly listed meeting is some sign of the deep state. Taibbi just keeps repeating claims that have long been exposed as garbage.

Taibbi was exposed as a partisan fraud in the hearing, and that should be one of the takeaways.

Yet much of the rest of the coverage of the hearing was like AP's, which treated the entire premise as if it were serious, dedicating the first four paragraphs to a (false) claim that this was the first that any of them had admitted throttling the NYP story was a mistake (as the hearing reviewed repeatedly, Roth had already given a deposition on the subject, and while the story quotes Jack Dorsey, it doesn't mention that he has testified to Congress as well). Nowhere in the AP story does it reveal that Comer's entire premise was debunked by the hearing. It's not until paragraphs 18 and 19 that AP mentions that the Twitter files presented no evidence for Comer's claim.

> The issue was also reignited recently after Musk took over Twitter as CEO and began to release a slew of company information to independent journalists, what he has called the "Twitter Files."
>
> The documents and data largely show internal debates among employees over the decision to temporarily censor links to the Hunter Biden story. The tweet threads lacked substantial evidence of a targeted influence campaign from Democrats or the FBI, which has denied any involvement in Twitter's decision-making.

Nowhere did AP reveal that Donald Trump was the only one guilty of the crime that Comer wants to pursue. Nowhere did AP reveal other instances where Twitter coddled Trump, as when they rewrote their content moderation standards on attacks on immigrants, which previously had banned the use of the term, "Go back to where you came from," to retroactively excuse their approval of a Trump attack on AOC and others.

Worse still, AP was silent about the degree to

which members like Clay Higgins started baselessly calling for the arrest of witnesses not accused, much less credibly, of a crime.

In other words, AP let James Comer dictate the terms of their story even after the premise of it had been debunked.

That's not journalism.

And there's one more reason why the press needs to treat these hearings not as a both-sides affair but as an effort to flip truth upside-down.

While neither have said this outright, both Comer's hearing and the first hearing of Jim Jordan's insurrection protection committee attacked the nation's ability to push back against disinformation, including, but not limited to, Russian disinformation.

And as Roth explained in the Twitter hearing, for example, Republican attacks on Twitter were an attack on efforts that came out of a *bipartisan response* to Russia's interference in the 2016 election.

> Shontel Brown:
>
> Mr. Roth, in a recent interview you stated, and I quote, beginning in 2017, every platform Twitter included, started to invest really heavily in building out an election integrity function. So I ask, were those investments driven in part by bipartisan concerns raised by Congress and the US government after the Russian influence operation in the 2016 presidential election?
>
> Yoel Roth:
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> Thank you for the question. Yes. Those concerns were fundamentally bipartisan. The Senate's investigation of Russian active measures was a bipartisan effort. The report was bipartisan, and I think we all share concerns with what Russia is doing to meddle in our elections.

This is what both hearings explicitly sought to roll back, those bipartisan efforts to protect American democracy.

Comer engaged in his own disinformation as part of the process. He falsely claimed that a letter from 50 former spooks said "Hunter Biden's laptop was Russian disinformation," rather than that it bore the hallmarks of disinformation. Jim Jordan and HPSCI Chair Mike Turner are now ratcheting up threats against those spooks for speech they engaged in as private citizens, precisely the thing that Jordan purports to be fighting.

In Jordan's insurrection protection hearing, he presented three witnesses purporting to talk about the weaponization of government. One, Tulsi Gabbard, presented as evidence of weaponizing government that private citizen Hillary Clinton claimed she was being "groomed" by Russia, something that had nothing to do with weaponizing government and everything to do with the free speech Tulsi purported to be defending. The two others, Chuck Grassley and Ron Johnson, complained that the FBI warned them their own investigation into private citizen Hunter Biden parroted an organized Russian campaign.

Taken together, these efforts are fairly unashamedly complaining that *private entities* — whether Twitter, Hillary, or former spooks — are exercizing their own right to speak up against Russian disinformation. That is, all three efforts use government resources against those speaking up against Russia.

And against the background of the Durham investigation — which investigated Hillary's campaign because of the way she responded to being victimized by a Russian attack — this effort continues a GOP-led effort to criminalize opposition to Russian disinformation.

There's no reason, journalistically, to treat this as a serious pursuit. Particularly not given the abundant evidence that these efforts are premised on false claims and easily debunked

propaganda, and are an attempt to legitimize that propaganda to serve as the basis for criminal investigations.

If James Comer and Jim Jordan want to squander their majority by building hearings and investigations around lies, the press should call them on that, not reward it. If they don’t, we’re headed down an increasingly ugly cycle.