

# Bill Kaplan: Johnson and Ryan: Heads in sand on Russian election meddling

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Back in December, the Washington Post dropped a bombshell: The CIA had “concluded” before the 2016 presidential election “that Russia intervened in the 2016 election to help Donald Trump win the presidency, rather than just to undermine confidence in the U.S. electoral system ....” In September, 2016 a secret intelligence briefing on the Russian meddling was held for Democratic and GOP congressional leaders, including Republicans House Speaker Paul Ryan and Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson. The Post reported that “Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) voiced doubts about the veracity of the intelligence ....” McConnell, Johnson and Ryan did nothing, heads in sand.

Crackerjack Urban Milwaukee journalist Bruce Murphy – early on – wrote about the secret intelligence briefing and GOP congressional inaction. The Obama administration wanted to get bipartisan support “urging state and local officials to take federal help in protecting their voting-registration and balloting machines from Russian cyber-intrusions” (Post). GOP leaders refused. Why did Johnson and Ryan fail to raise the alarm?

The evidence of Russian meddling in the 2016 election and collusion with the Trump campaign has become stronger. The New York Times opined: “Even more devastating, (Russian) hackers sought access to voter databases in at least 39 states, and in some cases tried to alter or delete data. They also appear to have tried to take over the computers of more than 100 election officials in the days before the Nov. 8 (presidential) vote.” Johnson and Ryan did not bestir themselves. Why not?

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The Russian-Trump scandal has reached “Watergate size and scale” according to Arizona GOP Senator John McCain. For example, Trump fired FBI Director James Comey. Obstruction of justice? Special Counsel Robert Mueller has assembled a high-powered team to investigate the scandal. Subpoenas and search warrants have been issued. And, more and more bombshells: Donald Trump, Jr., brother-in-law Jared Kushner and then Trump Campaign Chair Paul Manafort met with a Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer in June 2016 to receive incriminating information against Hillary Clinton. It was claimed by an intermediary who knows the Trumps to be “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.” It gets worse.

The New York Times reported: “(T)he Kremlin’s stealth intrusion into the election was far broader and more complex, involving a cyberarmy of bloggers posing as Americans and spreading propaganda and misinformation to an American electorate on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms .... (It) involved hundreds or even thousands of fake accounts on Facebook and Twitter that regularly posted anti-Clinton messages”. Virginia Democratic Senator Mark Warner, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said it was “the tip of the iceberg”. Earlier, Warner asserted that Russian meddling was targeted at Wisconsin, where Trump won by only 22,748 votes.

Alarm bells are ringing. Why are Johnson and Ryan still downplaying the scandal? Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher is one of a handful of Republicans publicly distressed by the Russia-Trump scandal. Other Republicans need to put country before party. Trump is in big trouble. History is knocking at the door.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.