

Bill Kaplan: Is Walker a Russian dupe?

Posted on Monday, Jul 23, 2018

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

My April 23 WisOpinion column, “The NRA, Russia and Governor Walker”, highlighted the connections between shady Russian operatives, including Maria Butina, the NRA and Wisconsin GOP Governor Scott Walker. The story for Wisconsinites was based on crackerjack reporting from McClatchy, Politico, Time and the Washington Post. There is renewed interest nationally and in Wisconsin with the Department of Justice (DOJ)’s indictment of Butina on Monday, July 16. The story is above the fold on front pages of newspapers, broadcast by TV-radio and all over the web. Walker is in the spotlight.

Butina has been charged by DOJ “with conspiracy to act as an agent of the Russian Federation within the United States” and for failure to register as a Russian agent. The DOJ said: “Butina worked at the direction of a high-level official in the Russian government (Alexander Torshin) ... to act as an agent of Russia inside the United States by developing relationships with U.S. persons and infiltrating organizations (e.g., NRA) having influence in American politics for the purpose of advancing the interests of the Russian Federation”.

The New York Times reported: “The charges were filed under seal on Saturday (July 14), the day after 12 Russian intelligence officers were indicted by (DOJ) for hacking Democratic computers to interfere with the 2016 (presidential) campaign. They were unsealed just hours after Mr. Trump stood beside Mr. Putin (in Finland) and said he saw no reason the Russian leader would try to influence the presidential election. Mr. Trump’s own intelligence chiefs have concluded otherwise. Together, the indictments portray a multifaceted effort by Russia to sway the election through computer espionage, personal overtures and the assistance of American intermediaries”.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword

notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Throughout the unfolding Russia scandal the former hawkish Walker has had the same dodged response: “I’ll leave that up to the people we elect to represent us in the federal government” (February); “I’ll leave that up to the people elected to federal office” (April) and “I’ll leave that up to federal folks” (July). However, Butina’s indictment has forced Walker’s hand. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported: Walker met Butina through the NRA, the FBI hasn’t “contacted” him and he greeted Butina in Russian because (Walker) “took Russian in college”.

However, there is more to Walker’s story. Butina and her handler Torshin developed a tight relationship with the NRA, including its president, David Keene (2011—2013). Former Wisconsinite Keene strongly supports Walker. The NRA has spent about \$3.5 million to elect Walker (Wisconsin Public Radio). Moreover, McClatchy and Politico report that the FBI and the Federal Election Commission are investigating illegal Russian contributions to the NRA to help Trump. What does Keene know?

There’s more. “In April 2015, Butina and Torshin traveled to Tennessee to attend a political fundraiser for a political group backing the presidential campaign of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, then viewed as a leading contender for the GOP nomination. In July, she (Butina) attended Walker’s campaign kickoff in Wisconsin” (Time). Too many coincidences. Is Walker a Russian dupe or just a useful idiot?

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