

Bill Kaplan: Down the rabbit hole with Johnson

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Last week, the GOP-led Senate Intelligence Committee released a report that dovetails with the Mueller Report and the unanimous findings of all U.S. intelligence agencies: “The committee found that Russia’s targeting of the 2016 U.S. presidential election was part of a broader, sophisticated and ongoing information warfare campaign. ... a vastly more complex and strategic assault on the United States than was initially understood ... an increasingly brazen interference by the Kremlin (against) the citizens and democratic institutions of the United States.”

The Washington Post said: “The committee report recounts extensive Russian manipulation of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Google and other major platforms with the goal of dividing Americans, suppressing African American turnout and helping elect Trump president.” Previously, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported on Russian interference in Wisconsin during 2016, and in 2018 (opposed Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin’s reelection).

Despite the overwhelming evidence of Russian interference and lawbreaking, Trump and his so-called personal attorney Rudolph Giuliani want to take America down the rabbit hole with a big lie: It was Ukraine, not Russia that interfered in 2016. And, that Ukraine framed the Russians to help Democrats. The conservative Wall Street Journal reported: “No evidence has emerged to support that theory.” Moreover, Trump’s former homeland security adviser, Thomas Bossert, said the Ukraine conspiracy theory was “completely debunked ... it has no validity.”

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Facts didn't stop Trump from raising it with Ukraine's President Zelensky in his infamous phone conversation: "I (Trump) would like you (Zelensky) to do us a favor though because our country has been through a lot (Mueller's investigation) and Ukraine knows a lot about it. I would like you to find out what happened" Then Trump asked Ukraine to dig up dirt on Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden. All along U.S. military aid to Ukraine and a White House visit dangled. It gets worse.

The Washington Post reported: "Two associates of President Trump's personal attorney Rudolph W. Giuliani have been arrested on charges they schemed to funnel foreign money to U.S. politicians ... to influence U.S.-Ukraine relations... ." Later, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, tied her ouster by Trump to "false claims" by Giuliani and those same "associates" who were opposed to her anti-corruption stance, while advancing their political-business interests.

However, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson wants to take America down the Trump-Giuliani rabbit hole. Writing in *The Hill*, the publication where Giuliani's false Ukraine conspiracy theory was planted, Johnson opined: "Far more troubling, is the mounting evidence of a possible coordinated effort to sabotage Trump's administration. These efforts may have included the engineered appointment of a special counsel (Mueller) to investigate the false narrative of Trump campaign collusion with Russia." Note: Mueller found that Russia interfered in 2016 to help elect Trump, and the Trump campaign "expected it would benefit electorally from information stolen and released through Russian efforts"

Instead of going down the rabbit hole Johnson should pay attention to the ongoing bombshells about Trump, Giuliani and Ukraine.

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