

U.S. Sens. Johnson, Grassley: Expand timeline of unmasking declassification request

Posted on Wednesday, May 20, 2020

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Sens. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, sent a letter Tuesday to Acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell to expand the scope of [their May 12 request related to the unmasking of Americans around the time of the 2016 election](#) to include information as early as January 2016.

The senators wrote, **“On May 13, 2020, you provided us with declassified information related to the “unmasking” of Lt. General Michael Flynn, and we very much appreciate your continued commitment to transparency. We write now both to reiterate our request for the declassification of additional information related to the unmasking of Americans around the time of the 2016 election, but also to expand the scope of our request to include information as early as January 2016. Based on our investigation and recent press reports, we are increasingly concerned that the surveillance of U.S. persons affiliated with the Trump campaign began earlier than the opening of the FBI’s Crossfire Hurricane investigation in late July 2016.**

“As we explained in our May 12, 2020, letter to you, one of the most significant unanswered questions about what occurred during the 2016

election is how many Americans were “unmasked,” at whose request, and for what purpose. It has become evident that the FBI, and possibly members of the U.S. Intelligence Community, were focused on U.S. persons affiliated with the Trump campaign in early 2016, if not even earlier. One example is that, in April 2016, FBI headquarters directed its New York Field Office to open a counterintelligence investigation of Carter Page, which on August 10, 2016, became part of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.”

Full text of the letter is below, and it can also be viewed [here](#).

May 19, 2020

Ambassador Richard Grenell

Acting Director

Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Dear Ambassador Grenell:

On May 13, 2020, you provided us with declassified information related to the “unmasking” of Lt. General Michael Flynn, and we very much appreciate your continued commitment to transparency.^[1] We write now both to reiterate our request for the declassification of additional information related to the unmasking of Americans around the time of the 2016 election, but also to expand the scope of our request to include information as early as January 2016. Based on our investigation and recent press reports, we are increasingly concerned that the surveillance of U.S. persons affiliated with the Trump campaign began earlier than the opening of the FBI’s Crossfire Hurricane investigation in late July 2016.^[2]

As we explained in our May 12, 2020, letter to you, one of the most significant unanswered questions about what occurred during the 2016 election is how many Americans were “unmasked,” at whose request, and for what purpose.^[3] It has become evident that the FBI, and possibly members of the U.S. Intelligence Community, were focused on U.S. persons affiliated with the Trump campaign in early 2016, if not even earlier.^[4] One example is that, in April 2016, FBI headquarters directed its New York Field Office to open a counterintelligence investigation of Carter Page, which on August 10, 2016, became part of the Crossfire Hurricane investigation.^[5]

Again, the best way to resolve these issues is to determine the truth, and to make clear to the American people what did and did not occur. For these reasons, we respectfully request that you make available to us, as soon as possible, all information regarding the “unmasking” of U.S. persons affiliated with the Trump campaign requested by members of President Obama’s administration from January 2016 through January 2017. If this request needs to be responded to in tranches, we would appreciate receiving unmasking information relating to the period of April through June 2016 first.

Should you have any questions, please contact Joseph Folio of Chairman Johnson’s staff at (202) 224-4751 and Joshua Flynn-Brown of Chairman Grassley’s staff at (202) 224-4515. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Ron Johnson
Chairman
Senate Committee on
Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Senate Finance Committee

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