

TO: Interested Parties
FR: Kate Bedingfield, Deputy Campaign Manager and Communications Director, Biden for President
DA: July 21, 2020
RE: The truth about the GOP's sham inquiry and discredited attacks regarding Ukraine

Senator Ron Johnson, who during the coronavirus pandemic has made a [number of appalling statements](#) about the [value](#) he places on American lives, is diverting the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee away from the rapidly worsening outbreak in order to waste taxpayer dollars on a farcical, long-debunked, hardcore rightwing conspiracy theory.

And he is the least credible person in the entire United States government to lead such a desperate taxpayer-funded smear campaign, because until less than a year ago he himself formally [supported](#) the bipartisan, international anti-corruption victory for which he's now investigating Joe Biden for delivering in Ukraine. Whether he will call himself as a witness remains unclear.

In the coming weeks, Johnson will attempt to relitigate comprehensively discredited accusations that Donald Trump drove himself into impeachment trying to force others to legitimize. To do so, Johnson will strain to provoke Democrats into responding to specific truncated and out of context snippets from documents and bad faith questioning of witnesses. It's an egregious misuse of his committee to further Donald Trump's political agenda at a time when he should focus the committee's work on responding to the pandemic.

Try as he might, Senator Johnson cannot escape the truth or distract from it. Below are the facts about Senator Johnson's charade.

- 1. Senator Johnson is diverting the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee away from the worsening coronavirus crisis in order to fixate on a long-debunked, hardcore rightwing conspiracy theory**

Because of Donald Trump's catastrophic mismanagement, the coronavirus pandemic is hitting the United States harder than any other industrialized country - most of which have effectively contained the disease. Over 140,000 Americans have died, tens of millions have lost their jobs, and we're setting records for new cases multiple times a week as the virus spirals even further out of control. But instead of dedicating the Senate Homeland Security Committee's taxpayer-funded resources to the worst public health crisis we've faced in over a century, Senator Johnson -- who has made a series of extremely troubling statements about the value of American lives during the outbreak -- is instead diverting those resources to a wasteful charade founded on an exposed lie.

For example, in March, Senator Johnson sparked a [national](#) controversy when he downplayed the threat of coronavirus, saying, "Getting coronavirus is not a death sentence except for maybe no more than 3.4 percent of our population." 3.4 percent of the U.S. population would be over 11 million people. This led to a [rebuke](#) from Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Undeterred, Senator Johnson continued to minimize the threat to American lives from COVID-19, later that month [writing](#) in USA Today, "Every premature death is a tragedy, but death is an unavoidable part of life."

The inescapable fact is, Senator Johnson should be working overtime to save American lives and jobs -- but instead, he's wasting taxpayer dollars on a blatantly dishonest attempt to help Donald Trump get reelected.

2. Senator Johnson himself repeatedly endorsed the firing of Viktor Shokin, including less than a year ago

Senator Johnson is arguably the most discredited individual in American government who could be involved with this farce - let alone "leading" it - because he fully and repeatedly endorsed Vice President Biden's efforts to remove Viktor Shokin from office, a sentiment he repeated less than one year ago.

In 2016, Johnson signed onto a bipartisan [letter](#) supporting the international effort to remove Shokin, in alignment with the U.S. government, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the Ukrainian anti-corruption community, and thousands of Ukrainian citizens protesting Shokin's corruption in the streets. Last October, Johnson reaffirmed his position, correctly [stating](#), "The whole world, by the way, including the Ukrainian caucus, which I signed the letter, the whole world felt that this, that Sholkin wasn't doing a [good] enough job. So we were saying hey you've ... got to rid yourself of corruption."

And yet, at the very same time that Donald Trump was on the path to impeachment for attempting to blackmail the Ukrainian government into spreading this conclusively disproven conspiracy theory for him, Senator Johnson executed one of the most ham-handed flip flops in recent memory.

This makes it impossible to believe that Senator Johnson is sincere. Because if he were, he would have to believe that he himself was in on this supposedly sordid worldwide scheme executed by Joe Biden. Maybe 2020 Ron Johnson should call 2016-2019 Ron Johnson as a witness?

3. Senate Republicans themselves have warned that this sham is a windfall for Russian disinformation

Concern over this charade is bipartisan. Members of the Senate Republican Conference itself have registered that Senator Johnson and Senator Grassley's work would be a bonanza for the Russian government as it seeks to spread division in the United States, [including](#) Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Marco Rubio.

Politico has [reported](#) that in December, Senator Richard Burr "told the leaders of the Senate Homeland Security and Finance committees — Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and Chuck Grassley of Iowa, respectively — that their probe targeting Biden could aid Russian efforts to sow chaos and distrust in the U.S. political system..."

And in February, Senator Lindsey Graham [warned](#), "Any documents coming out of the Ukraine against any American, Republican or Democrat, need to be looked at by the intelligence services who have expertise - I don't — because Russia is playing us all like a fiddle."

4. Senator Johnson, the Trump Campaign, the White House, and the State Department are refusing to say whether they are party to a foreign influence operation

Over the last several months, pro-Russian Ukrainians, led by Andriy Derkach, a member of the Ukrainian parliament who graduated from a KGB academy and is known as "The Ukrainian Putin," have released a number of heavily edited audio recordings purportedly of then-Vice President Biden conducting official U.S. business in Ukraine. Russian propaganda outlets like Sputnik News and RT have heavily covered these releases, explicitly calling on Western press to do so -- though Western press, reflecting the lessons of 2016, have only passingly covered them in the [context](#) of being attempts to influence the American presidential election.

Ukrainians involved with these leaks have said on the record, to [Sputnik News](#) and to [The Washington Post](#), that they have provided similar materials to Trump aides and to Senator Johnson's staff, indicating that Republicans plan to use them later in the year to affect the campaign.

However, Senator Johnson, the Trump campaign, the White House, and the State Department have all declined to comment on whether that is true - meaning that each are refusing to tell the American people whether they are party to a foreign influence operation against the United States, which is a legitimate scandal and not a fabricated distraction.

5. Every fact checker and major nonpartisan news outlet has affirmed that this conspiracy theory is debunked, as have Trump Administration officials under oath

The conspiracy theory at the core of Johnson's inquiry and of Donald Trump's wild accusations has been exhaustively investigated and declared false by every major fact checker, including [The Washington Post](#), [The Associated Press](#), [PolitiFact](#), and others.

This lie has been called out as "debunked" or "discredited" by [The New York Times](#), [The Associated Press](#), [Bloomberg](#), [The Washington Post](#), [BuzzFeed](#), [The Wall Street Journal](#), [NBC News](#), and [Politico](#).

Donald Trump's former top envoy to Ukraine, a Republican-called witness during the House impeachment hearings, [said](#) under oath, "The allegations against Vice President Biden are self-serving and non-credible."

The fact is that the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, multiple European governments, the entire Ukrainian anti-corruption community, and thousands of Ukrainians protesting in the streets all concurred with the bipartisan view in the United States, and the official position of the U.S. government reached through an interagency process, that Viktor Shokin was manifestly corrupt and an impediment to reform in Ukraine.

And Donald Trump's contention that Biden was executing some kind of self-interested plot and that Shokin was a good faith official undeserving of losing his position is laughable.

Shokin was notorious for beginning investigations and either letting them idle indefinitely or ceasing them upon receiving extortion payments. After his subordinates were revealed for hoarding diamonds received as bribes and other contraband, the officials investigating them lost their jobs. He was seen across Ukraine and the international community as toxic.