

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE CHAIR CHUCK GRASSLEY HAS SPENT THE WEEK COWERING FROM HIS PARTY'S LEGAL PROBLEMS



In response to Monday's server hiccups and in anticipation that Mueller is nowhere near done, we expanded our server capacity overnight. If you think you'll rely on emptywheel reporting on the Mueller probe, please consider a donation to support the site.

Of all the Republicans responding their President's increasing legal woes, Chuck Grassley – the Chair of the Judiciary Committee – has had the most appalling week.

On Monday (even before news of the George Papadopoulos plea broke), when reporters started asking about Paul Manafort's indictment, Grassley used some American flags as cover to hide his escape.

On Wednesday, after it became clear that Papadopoulos told the FBI Grassley's fellow Iowan, Sam Clovis, had prioritized chumming up to Russia on the campaign generally, and encouraged Papadopoulos to set up meetings with the Russians as late as August 2016 (two months after it was public they had hacked the DNC), the Senate Judiciary Committee Chair said the

allegations would not be an issue in Clovis' confirmation to US Department of Agriculture.

Grassley said he has reviewed emails provided by the Trump campaign that include a fuller account of Clovis' interactions with Papadopoulos. According to those 80-some emails, Grassley said, Clovis does not appear to encourage any travel to meet with Russian officials.

"There's an entirely different context than what was reported about Clovis and his relationship to this George P.," Grassley told reporters.

The emails he reviewed cannot be released publicly, Grassley said, although some of them have been referenced in published newspaper accounts and are referred to in the court document from the Papadopoulos case.

When asked if he believes Clovis could face legal consequences over his role in the campaign, Grassley answered that it was "too early for me to say that."

"But," he went on, "reading these emails ... that's not an issue."

Grassley was still prepared to introduce Clovis at his then planned confirmation hearing, even after the allegations.

Even the White House seems to disagree with Grassley's assessment that these allegations are "not an issue" though, because Clovis has since withdrawn from consideration.

And then later on Wednesday, several days after I first showed that the Papadopoulos plea showed that Jeff Sessions had perjured himself yet again in Senate testimony, Chuck Grassley was still unsure whether he'd even call on the Attorney General to explain his serial lies before his committee.

Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley said Thursday he was still learning all the details about the Papadopoulos matter.

Asked if Sessions should amend his testimony before his committee, Grassley told CNN: "I'm looking into it."

I've long defended Grassley's legitimate questions about the investigation – most notably questions about the Steele dossier. But all week the senior Republican overseer of the Justice Department has been cowering from the clear implications of this scandal. Perhaps it's because Grassley has a duty, here, to ensure the integrity of a department led by a serial perjurer, he has instead been hiding and dodging.