

TRUMP'S GREENLIGHT: ASKING FOR FOREIGN AID AND ASSISTANCE VIA PRIME TIME TV

[NB: Check the byline, thanks! /~Rayne]

The balls on this guy. It's no wonder Trump walks like he does, having to drag around abnormal fleshbags of unmitigated gall and corruption everywhere he goes.

By now most of our regular readers have seen Trump interviewed by ABC News' George Stephanopolous. In case you haven't:

This is still stunning for its in-your-face indifference to campaign finance law:

Asked by ABC News Chief Anchor George Stephanopoulos in the Oval Office on Wednesday whether his campaign would accept such information from foreigners – such as China or Russia – or hand it over the FBI, Trump said, “I think maybe you do both.”

“I think you might want to listen, there isn't anything wrong with listening,” Trump continued. “If somebody called from a country, Norway, [and said] ‘we have information on your opponent’ – oh, I think I'd want to hear it.”

...

“It's not an interference, they have information – I think I'd take it,” Trump said. “If I thought there was something wrong, I'd go maybe to the FBI – if I thought there was something wrong. But when somebody comes up with oppo research, right, they come up with oppo research, ‘oh let's call the FBI.’ The FBI doesn't have enough agents to

take care of it. When you go and talk, honestly, to congressman, they all do it, they always have, and that's the way it is. It's called oppo research." ...

There's a lot packed into this exchange with Stephanopolous, the most obvious being Trump's blow off of Title 52 USC 30121 which prohibits candidates and campaigns from receiving anything of value from a foreign national. Specifically:

52 U.S. Code § 30121 – Contributions and donations by foreign nationals

(a) Prohibition It shall be unlawful for—

· · (1) a foreign national, directly or indirectly, to make—

· · · · (A) a contribution or donation of money or other thing of value, or to make an express or implied promise to make a contribution or donation, in connection with a Federal, State, or local election;

· · · · (B) a contribution or donation to a committee of a political party; or

· · · · (C) an expenditure, independent expenditure, or disbursement for an electioneering communication (within the meaning of section 30104(f)(3) of this title); or

· · · · (2) a person to solicit, accept, or receive a contribution or donation described in subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (1) from a foreign national.

(b) "Foreign national" defined As used in this section, the term "foreign national" means—

· · (1) a foreign principal, as such term is defined by section 611(b) of title 22, except that the term "foreign national" shall not include any individual who is a citizen of the United States; or

· · (2) an individual who is not a citizen of the United States or a

national of the United States (as defined in section 1101(a)(22) of title 8) and who is not lawfully admitted for permanent residence, as defined by section 1101(a)(20) of title 8.

Emphasis mine.

“Directly or indirectly” may include the kinds of contributions the National Rifle Association made to candidates’ campaigns with Russian money, especially after guidance from Maria Butina and/or her boss Aleksandr Torshin, and/or her American handler, Paul Erickson.

“Other thing of value” may include polling data or stolen emails or manipulation of the media since any of these items might otherwise require a candidate’s campaign to buy these items. We don’t yet know *exactly* what Paul Manafort and Konstantin Kilimnik exchanged on August 2 – including 75 pages of “gibberish” polling data and likely high-level analysis and specific post-meeting performance – 2016 but if it was important enough to warrant sustained prevarication, it was something valuable.

Trump can no longer claim stupidity and ignorance after the Special Counsel’s Office investigation into Trump-Russia. His blow-off reveals a deliberate mindset, an intent to violate the law if the opportunity presents itself.

Even merely listening to an offer of aid or assistance directly or indirectly from a foreign national is problematic because the offer itself may be valuable.

“There isn’t anything wrong with listening,” Trump said, which is what his son, son-in-law, and campaign manager did in June 2016 during the Trump Tower meeting. Their presence merely to listen was a greenlight advising foreign nationals that Trump’s campaign was willing and approved help from outside the U.S. to influence the U.S. elections.

And that's what Trump did during his interview with Stephanopolous: he greenlighted more foreign aid and assistance to help his campaign.

He did it from behind the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. He never once slowed Stephanopolous to tell him "I can't talk about campaign efforts while being interviewed as president in the office of the presidency."

Was he soliciting for his campaign while on camera? For all the hullabaloo today about Kelly Anne Conway's egregious and repeated Hatch Act violations, Trump's likely violation—campaigning while on our dime got lost.[1]

Not only did he express a willingness to violate campaign finance law and allow himself to be influenced in the process, not only did he ~~commit a Hatch Act violation~~, fail to separate his work as president from work for his personal re-election campaign,[1] but he pissed on Republican candidates known and as-yet unknown who may choose to primary him.

He didn't differentiate for which opposition he was open to receiving an opposition research pitch from foreign entities. He did not say he was interested in hearing solely about Democratic candidates.

Nor did he entertain listening solely for his presidential race. Opponents aren't just those running against you in a campaign. One could argue that Trump has the entire U.S. intelligence apparatus at his disposal but he can't be sure they would provide campaign data or offer to perform dirty tricks on behalf of the POTUS. A foreign entity, especially a hostile one? Sure.

Which is exactly what the Russian Internet Research Agency did in 2016 targeting Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz during the Republican primary.

In spite of the 2016 attacks and Trump's express willingness to entertain foreign assistance, the Republicans have just plain rolled over for

Trump. You think the House Democratic leadership is feckless? Bah. Republicans are utter dupes.

Trump telegraphs the defense he'll use – and the attack he attends to take – when he calls the material he's soliciting "oppo research." The aid Trump's campaign received in 2016 wasn't opposition research on Hillary Clinton; it was stolen emails leaked to generate negative sentiment about Clinton. It was micro-targeted negative messaging aimed at vulnerable populations to persuade leaners and suppress tentative voters, and a bunch of unauthorized but welcomed advertisements. It was likely more in the form of attempts on voting infrastructure, whether merely to collect data or to manipulate the system.

When Trump called it "oppo research," he was establishing what he believed was a parallel – what the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) acquired through its law firm, Perkins Coie, which in turn purchased opposition research from Fusion GPS. Fusion GPS obtained the services of former MI6 officer Christopher Steele to continue a dossier originally started on behalf of Washington Free Beacon in late 2015. Trump and other campaign minions like Carter Page have frequently claimed the opposition research dossier was "dodgy" and illegitimate, and yet Trump feels entitled to opposition research without restrictions, as if Clinton and the DNC had not followed campaign finance laws.

Whatever the quality of its contents, the Steele dossier was a campaign expenditure, a compilation of information ultimately paid for by the campaign and the DNC – wholly legal – and the material was contracted by an American entity from another American entity.

What Trump's campaign received in 2016 – goods and services were given to the campaign directly and indirectly by foreign entities like the Internet Research Agency – were NOT legal.

Trump will do whatever he can to muddy the

distinction between wholly legal campaign expenses and contributions or things of value received from foreign nationals in order to protect his chances at re-election and lay the ground work to attack his last campaign opponent.

There's one more disturbing nit about Trump's solicitation. What Trump has done in his greenlighting on camera is solicit foreign assistance. This does not rule out solicitation of foreign direction.

At what point is the Department of Justice's National Security Division engaged when the president greenlights or solicits foreign assistance and direction?

Should the presidential campaign be under counterintelligence investigation right now and forward?

Not that there aren't already ample reasons for the Trump 2020 campaign to be scrutinized given the number of Chinese nationals hanging out at Mar-a-Lago, with at least one allegedly bundling donations for Trump's re-election.

Might make one wonder if Trump's greenlight on ABC is after the fact – and not after the fact about the 2016 election.

[1] Edited to reflect the Hatch Act does not apply to the president – however, this is problematic as Trump has shown repeatedly, including in this interview. At what point is he talking about accepting 'foreign assistance and direction' from foreign nationals or other nation-states for the purposes of his personal re-election campaign and accepting the same for U.S. interests? His personal interests are not one-for-one the same as the nation's interests, unless of course he'd like to deed over all his businesses.

I'd also like to point out the phrase 'foreign assistance and direction' is the distinction the

DOJ uses to differentiate non-domestic from domestic terrorism. That the president was entertaining the idea of using 'foreign assistance and direction' to aid his campaign whether spelled out in those specific terms or not surely worries U.S. intelligence community members who recognize the inherent risks.

The Hatch Act should be revisited with Trump and the office of the presidency in mind not only because of his greenlighting foreign pitches of assistance to his campaign. Throughout the last two years Trump has spoken at rallies which have occurred in tandem with special and mid-term elections in order to sway locals to vote for the GOP candidate. His arrival and support at each of these venues comes at the expense of public funds – local, state, federal – and not the GOP or Trump's campaign committee. He has also stiffed at least ten cities for additional expenses related to his attendance at rallies, a form of additional tax the citizens didn't approve in advance. But they're forced to produce additional security because he's the president even though he's there to campaign.

The job of the presidency must be separated from campaigning, and no campaigning should happen without the campaign absorbing the expense. Add this to the Hatch Act: the president should NOT be immune.