

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 20, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on the Judiciary and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence are conducting oversight of federal law-enforcement and intelligence matters within our respective jurisdictions. We are examining the origins of the infamous public statement signed by 51 former intelligence officials that falsely discredited a *New York Post* story regarding Hunter Biden's laptop as supposed Russian disinformation. As part of our oversight, we have learned that you played a role in the inception of this statement while serving as a Biden campaign advisor, and we therefore request your assistance with our oversight.

On October 14, 2020, the *New York Post* published a report detailing how Hunter Biden used the position and influence of his father, now-President Joe Biden, for personal gain with the apparent awareness of President Biden.¹ The article reported on several emails found on a laptop belonging to Hunter Biden that he had abandoned in a Delaware computer shop.² The contents of the emails cast doubt on President Biden's previous denials of speaking to his son about his international business dealings.

Within five days of the article, on October 19, 2020, 51 former intelligence officials released a public statement attempting to discredit the contents of the *New York Post*'s reporting about Hunter Biden, stating that the story "has all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation."³ News publications immediately ran with the statement, with *Politico* publishing a story with the conclusive headline, "Hunter Biden story is Russian disinfo, dozens of former officials say."⁴ Social media companies simultaneously restricted access to the *Post* story, including Twitter locking the *Post*'s and then-White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany's

¹ Emma-Jo Morris & Gabrielle Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 14, 2020).

² *Id.*

³ Jim Clapper et al., Public Statement on the Hunter Biden Emails (Oct. 19, 2020).

⁴ Natasha Bertrand, *Hunter Biden story is Russian disinfo, dozens of former intel officials say*, POLITICO (Oct. 19, 2020).

accounts for sharing a link to the article.⁵ During the final presidential debate on October 22, then-Vice President Biden cited the public statement to rebut President Trump's criticism of the Biden family business dealings, saying:

Look, there are 50 former national intelligence folks who said that what this, [President Trump's] accusing me of is a Russian plan. They have said this this has all the characteristics—four—five former heads of the CIA, both parties, say what he's saying is a bunch of garbage. Nobody believes it except him and his good friend Rudy Giuliani.⁶

Subsequent reporting revealed that the *New York Post* story was not, as the public statement claimed and then-Vice President Biden parroted, part of a "Russian information operation."⁷ This revelation nearly two years after the fact, however, was little consolation. The concerted efforts to dismiss the serious allegations in the *Post*'s reporting and to suppress any discussion of the story played a substantial role in the 2020 election.

The Committees recently conducted a transcribed interview with Michael Morell, a former Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and one of the 51 signatories of the public statement. In his transcribed interview, Morell testified that on or around October 17, 2020, you reached out to him to discuss the Hunter Biden laptop story.⁸ At the time you served as a senior advisor to the Biden campaign. According to Morell, although your outreach was couched as simply gathering Morell's reaction to the *Post* story, it set in motion the events that led to the issuance of the public statement.⁹ Morell testified:

Q: But, prior to [Secretary Blinken's] call, you – you did not have any intent to write this statement?

A: I did not.

Q: Okay. So his call triggered –

A: It did, yes.

Q: – that intent in you?

⁵ See, e.g., Elizabeth Dwoskin, *Facebook and Twitter take unusual steps to limit spread of New York Post story*, WASH. POST (Oct. 15, 2020).

⁶ Comm'n on Presidential Debates, *Presidential Debate at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee* (Oct. 22, 2020).

⁷ See, e.g., Katie Brenner et al., *Hunter Biden paid tax bill, but broad federal investigation continues*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 16, 2022; Matt Viser et al., *Inside Hunter Biden's multimillion-dollar deals with a Chinese energy company*, WASH. POST, Mar. 30, 2022.

⁸ See Transcribed Interview of Mr. Michael Morell at 97.

⁹ See *id.* at 21-22, 25.

A: Yes. Absolutely.¹⁰

That same day, October 17, you also emailed Morell an article published in *USA Today* alleging that the FBI was examining whether the Hunter Biden laptop was part of a “disinformation campaign.”¹¹ The very bottom of the email you sent to Morell included the signature block of Andrew Bates, then-director of rapid response for the Biden campaign.¹²

Morell testified that his communication with you was one of a few communications he had with the Biden campaign, explaining that he also received a call from Steve Ricchetti, Chairman of the Biden campaign, following the October 22 debate to thank him for writing the statement.¹³ He testified:

After the debate – I think it was after the debate – in fact, I’m pretty sure it was after the debate – I got a phone call from Jeremy Bash, who I work with at Beacon and who is active politically. And Jeremy said: Do you have a minute to talk to Steve Ricchetti?

I said: Of course.

He was the head of the Biden campaign at the time. And Jeremy got him on the line, and Steve thanked me for putting the statement out. And that was the extent of the conversation.¹⁴

Morell also explained that the Biden campaign helped to strategize about the public release of the statement. Morell testified that he sent an email telling Nick Shapiro, former Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to the Director of the CIA John Brennan, that the Biden campaign wanted the statement to go to a particular reporter at the *Washington Post* first and that he should send the statement to the campaign when he sent the letter to the reporter.¹⁵ Morell testified, however, that he did not recall why he told Shapiro the campaign wanted the statement to go to this reporter first and admitted that he may have spoken to the campaign on another occasion.¹⁶

Morell further explained that one of his two goals in releasing the statement was to help then-Vice President Biden in the debate and to assist him in winning the election.¹⁷ He testified:

Q: What was the intent of the statement?

¹⁰ *Id.* at 21-22.

¹¹ *Id.* at 22. See email from Anthony Blinken to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 10:53 p.m.).

¹² Email from Anthony Blinken to Michael Morell (Oct. 17, 2020, 10:53 p.m.).

¹³ Morell interview at 97.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at 23.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 104.

¹⁷ See *id.* at 11, 34, 102.

A: There were two intents. One intent was to share our concern with the American people that the Russians were playing on this issue; and, two, it was [to] help Vice President Biden.¹⁸

* * *

Chairman Jordan: You wanted to help the Vice President why?

A: Because I wanted him to win the election.

Chairman Jordan: You wanted him to win; that's why?

A: Yes, sir.¹⁹

Based on Morell's testimony, it is apparent that the Biden campaign played an active role in the origins of the public statement, which had the effect of helping to suppress the Hunter Biden story and preventing American citizens from making a fully informed decision during the 2020 presidential election.²⁰ Although the statement's signatories have an unquestioned right to free speech and free association—which we do not dispute—their reference to their national security credentials lent weight to the story and suggested access to specialized information unavailable to other Americans. This concerted effort to minimize and suppress public dissemination of the serious allegations about the Biden family was a grave disservice to all American citizens' informed participation in our democracy.

Based on the information we have obtained to date, we believe that you possess material that would advance our oversight and inform potential legislative reforms. Accordingly, we ask that you please provide the following information and records in your personal possession:

1. Identify all people with whom you communicated about the inception, drafting, editing, signing, publishing, or promotion of the "Public Statement on the Hunter Biden Emails" dated October 19, 2020, during the period October 14, 2020, to November 24, 2020; and
2. Produce all documents and communications referring or relating to the "Public Statement on the Hunter Biden Emails" dated October 19, 2020, sent or received between October 14, 2020, and November 24, 2020.

Please produce this material as soon as possible but no later than 5:00 p.m. on May 4, 2023. Because these events occurred prior to your nomination and confirmation as Secretary of State, we seek your cooperation with our requests in your personal, and not your official,

¹⁸ *Id.* at 11.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 102.

²⁰ See, e.g., David Folkenflik, *More details emerge in federal investigation into Hunter Biden*, Nat'l Pub. Radio (Apr. 9, 2022); Jacob Siegel, *A guide to understanding the hoax of the Century*, Tablet (Mar. 28, 2023).

The Honorable Antony Blinken

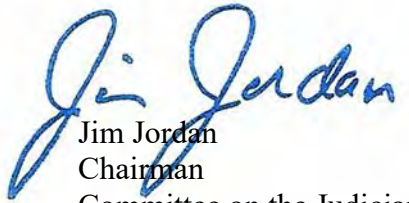
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capacity. Although our requests do not implicate Department equities, and accordingly there should be no basis for the Department to interfere with our oversight, we have addressed these requests to you in your official capacity initially as a courtesy. If you are represented by private counsel in this matter, please ask your attorney to contact Judiciary Committee staff promptly on your behalf at (202) 225-6906.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jim Jordan
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary



Michael R. Turner
Chairman
Permanent Select Committee on
Intelligence

cc: The Honorable Jerrold L. Nadler, Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
The Honorable Jim Himes, Ranking Member, Permanent Select Committee on
Intelligence