



All the President's Accomplices

Republicans in Congress

By The Moscow Project

Congressional Republicans have blocked, stone-walled, or deflected every effort to investigate or respond to Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. The pattern of Republican obstruction is clear. At every step of the way, Republicans in Congress have conspired to shield President Donald Trump from a thorough investigation of the attack. As [Robert Kagan](#) warned months ago, congressional Republicans are effectively acting as “Russia’s accomplices.”

President Trump has [publicly pressured](#) numerous Senate members to end the Russia investigations. Congressional Republican reticence when it comes to conducting these investigations, whether motivated by the president’s pressure or not, is unmistakable. As Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s team begins to issue indictments, more and more Republican members of Congress have sought to attack Mueller and distract from his probe in a desperate effort to protect the president and throw sand in the public’s eyes.

Republicans in Congress have:

- Slow-rolled the congressional investigations and blocked the establishment of congressional select committees and the [creation](#) of an independent commission.
- Worked with the White House to [undermine](#) and obstruct ongoing investigations.
- Refused to issue [subpoenas](#) and canceled meetings and hearings.
- Ignored [warnings](#) from the intelligence community.
- Succumbed to [pressure](#) from President Trump to hinder the investigations.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA)
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee

Sen. Grassley previously co-led the Senate Judiciary Committee's investigation into Russian interference with Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), but his partisan agenda led the two to split in October 2017. Grassley's intention to broaden the investigation into the Trump administration's connections with Russia to include former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign shows an attempt to spread thin resources and time, distract from the ultimate stated goal, and divide the committee—all pointing to his lack of commitment to the investigation.

Sen. Grassley has:

- **Cut out his Democratic counterpart from the investigation, violating the bipartisan standard.** Sen. Grassley issued [requests](#) seeking interviews with Trump officials without Sen. Feinstein's signature. He also sent inquiries to the FBI asking for information on the thoroughly debunked Uranium One controversy.
- **Resisted issuing subpoenas.** Although Sen. Feinstein urged him to issue a subpoena for Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, Sen. Grassley initially [declined](#) to do so.
- **Criticized the former acting director of the FBI, distracting from President Trump's massive conflicts of interests and potential obstruction of justice.** Grassley [defended](#) Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey. Prior to Christopher Wray's confirmation as FBI director, Grassley called for the recusal of the acting director, Andrew McCabe, claiming that McCabe had conflicts of interest due to campaign contributions his wife had received from a Clinton ally.
- **Allowed high-ranking Trump officials to skate by without testifying.** Grassley [noticeably](#) did not "[seek] to compel Attorney General Jeff Sessions to testify before his committee" about Sessions' contacts with Russians during the campaign.
- **Torpedoed a bipartisan investigation, causing a split.** Grassley's partisan conduct as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee led Sen. Feinstein to split from Grassley's investigation because he was [intent](#) on broadening his focus "to examine the role of the DNC and the Clinton campaign."

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)

Senate Majority Leader

As Senate Majority Leader, McConnell has ignored repeated warnings from the U.S. intelligence community about Russia's intentions and has been steadfast in opposing a thorough and independent investigation of Russian interference in the election.

Sen. McConnell has:

- **Run interference for President Trump about Russian efforts in the election as early as 2015 by ignoring warnings about Russian interference.** McConnell, along with other Senate and House leaders, was [reportedly briefed](#) by U.S. intelligence officials about ongoing Russian efforts to hack the Democratic Party in the summer of 2015. In late August 2016, CIA Director John Brennan began a series of [“urgent, individual”](#) briefings for the “Gang of Eight” members, including McConnell, to inform them of Russian efforts to elect then-candidate Trump.
- **Blocked a bipartisan response to Russian interference during the election.** In [September 2016](#), the “Gang of 12”—which includes House and Senate leaders and chairmen and ranking members of the intelligence and homeland security committees—received another briefing from senior intelligence officials on Russian interference in the election. Congressional Republican leadership [prevented](#) a bipartisan statement condemning this interference. Sen. McConnell [“raised doubts about the underlying intelligence”](#) and issued a statement about election security that failed to mention Russia at all.
- **Resisted calls for independent investigations.** Despite warnings from the intelligence community, McConnell has [time and time again](#) resisted calls for an independent, vigorous investigation and thrown his support behind truncated efforts by standing Senate committees to investigate the matter. Trump has also [pressured](#) McConnell to ensure that the Russia investigation comes to an end quickly.

Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA)
Chair, House Intelligence Committee

Rep. Nunes was a member of the Trump transition team. Despite Nunes' link to the Trump administration, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan has allowed Nunes, as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, to lead the House's effort to investigate Russian interference. Over the past year, Nunes has sought to block, stall, and distract from the investigation, even concocting a charade with the White House that ultimately forced his temporary recusal from leading the House investigation.

Rep. Nunes has:

- **Orchestrated a charade about unmasking to distract from the investigation.** Nunes' complicity with the Trump administration culminated with the charade he pulled in late March, when he publicly presented [misleading information](#) fed to him by the White House in attempt to vindicate the president's distracting claim that Trump Tower had been wiretapped. The White House had made clear that it had been coordinating with Nunes on a strategy that "[kicked up a cloud of peripheral issues](#)"—such as the issue of leaks—to distract from the seriousness of the Russia investigation.
- **Served as one of Trump's main defenders in Congress.** From day one, Nunes has ["cheered \[Trump\] vocally"](#) and [said](#) that "he [had] seen no evidence of any coordination between the Trump camp and the Russians during the campaign.
- **Questioned the CIA's December assessment.** After the CIA reached its initial assessment in December 2016 that Russia had interfered in the election, Nunes doubted the veracity of the CIA's conclusion, [commenting](#), "I'll be the first one to come out and point at Russia if there's clear evidence, but there is no clear evidence—even now."
- **Initially balked at opening an investigation.** He [told Politico](#) in January that he did not believe Congress should be investigating contacts between Russian officials and the Trump campaign, saying, "House committees don't go operational like that, that I know of."
- **Acted as a surrogate to counter news stories about Trump's ties to Russia in calls "[orchestrated by the White House](#)."** In mid-February, Nunes became one of several members of Congress [enlisted](#) by the White House to help publicly counter news stories about alleged contacts between Trump associates and Russian officials. Unlike the others contacted by the White House, Nunes went on the record with *The Wall Street Journal*. Nunes' spokesman said that, "at the request of a White House communications aide, Chairman Nunes then spoke to an additional reporter."

- **Compared the Trump-Russia investigation to McCarthyism and a witch hunt.** On February 25, Nunes [called](#) the Trump-Russia investigation a “witch hunt” and likened it to “McCarthyism revisited.”
- **Sought to block hearings and stall the investigation.** After the bombshell hearing with former FBI Director Comey on March 20, 2017, Nunes [canceled](#) a hearing during which former acting Attorney General Sally Yates had planned to testify, leading top congressional Democrats to claim that the investigation had stalled. Under Nunes’ leadership, regular meetings were canceled as well.
- **Met with a future witness in the investigation.** Earlier in 2017, Nunes met with Erik Prince, who has been called to testify before the House Intelligence Committee during its Russia probe. This meeting [included](#) a discussion of “Nunes’ investigation into the unmasking of Americans’ identities in U.S. intelligence reports.”
- **Continues to interfere in the investigation even after his recusal.** Despite the fact that Nunes has recused himself from the Russia investigation, he signed subpoenas that were sent to Fusion GPS in October 2017. These subpoenas were reportedly issued “[without the minority’s agreement.](#)” Nunes’ involvement in these subpoenas indicated that he was still involved in an investigation from which he had recused himself, thus potentially undermining the investigation itself.
- **Led the effort to create a new bogus scandal involving Uranium One.** In another effort to distract from the investigation, Nunes held a press conference calling for an investigation into former Secretary of State Clinton’s role, as one of nine cabinet members, in the approval of a sale of uranium mine.
 - Recent claims have surfaced questioning Clinton’s alleged involvement in selling 20 percent of U.S. uranium to Russian interests. Even though these claims have been repeatedly [debunked](#), Nunes has still [announced](#) a new probe into how this deal was handled by the Obama administration.
 - Roger Stone [explained](#) the true motive for this, telling *Vanity Fair* that a prosecutor looking into Uranium One would also have to investigate the FBI’s role in approving the deal, making Mueller a target because he was FBI director at the time.

Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI)

Speaker of the House

As a member of the “Gang of Eight”, which includes the majority and ranking members of the House and Senate with access to the most highly-classified intelligence, Ryan received regular highly-classified briefings on Russian interference in the 2016 election. Ignoring repeated warnings from the U.S. intelligence community, Ryan brushed aside damning information about Trump and his associates, advised and encouraged Nunes to distract from the House Intelligence Committee’s investigation, and blocked the establishment of an Independent Commission.

Speaker Ryan has:

- **Ignored warnings about Russia’s intervention before the election.** Ryan was [reportedly briefed](#) by U.S. intelligence officials about ongoing Russian efforts to hack the Democratic Party as early as the summer of 2015.
 - In June 2016, Ryan and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) met with the Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman, who outlined Russian efforts to undermine Ukraine by supporting pro-Russian populist politicians and parties. This led McCarthy to speculate, “There’s two people I think Putin pays: Rohrabacher and Trump”, which [prompted](#) Ryan to tell those attending the meeting, “No leaks ... This is how we know we’re a real family here.”
 - In late August 2016, CIA Director John Brennan began a series of [“urgent, individual”](#) briefings for the “Gang of Eight” members, including Ryan, to inform them of Russian efforts to elect then-candidate Trump.
- **Defended former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn’s calls with the Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak.** Ryan [has maintained](#) that Flynn’s conversations with Kislyak, which drew FBI scrutiny and ultimately led to his resignation, were “entirely appropriate” and within his “job description.” Flynn [pleaded guilty](#) to lying to the FBI about these conversations in December 2016, indicating that they were neither appropriate nor within the scope of his position as national security adviser.
- **Blocked action to investigate Russia.** Ryan is shielding Trump from the Russia investigation by rejecting calls for an independent commission and investigation.
 - Following the CIA’s December 2016 assessment that Russia interfered in the election to help Trump win, Ryan [rejected calls](#) for an independent probe, instead placing his support behind the existing work of House Intelligence Committee on cyber threats.

- Ryan again [declined to support](#) an independent Russia investigation after Flynn's resignation in February 2017.
- On May 10, after the president abruptly fired the now former FBI Director Comey, Ryan [told](#) Fox News that he didn't think an independent commission was "a good idea" because he thought "the intelligence committees are the ones that should do this."
- **Backed Nunes** in his unmasking charade which prompted a House ethics investigation.
- Ryan was informed by Nunes about his unmasking charade before it was launched. Nunes notified the public in a [press conference](#) that he had "informed Speaker Ryan this morning of this information."
- Later, Ryan [defended](#) Nunes as he tried to torpedo the House Intelligence Committee's investigation by focusing instead on Trump's fabricated wiretapping allegations.

Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-SC)
Chairman, House Oversight Committee

In his role as chairman of House Oversight Committee, Rep. Gowdy has blocked subpoenas and has been [accused](#) of acting as “the defense attorney for the administration.” He has [ignored](#) Democratic committee members’ attempts to further investigate Flynn and been [criticized](#) for being too soft on members of the Trump administration during their [testimonies](#), demonstrating that he is not taking the investigation seriously.

Rep. Gowdy has:

- **Refused to investigate the claims of a potentially critical whistleblower.** Gowdy’s refusal to investigate a whistleblower’s claims regarding Flynn’s position towards Russian sanctions represents a clear effort to undermine the Russia investigation.
 - Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, wrote a letter in December 2017 [stating](#) that a whistleblower had come to him in June 2017 to report that Flynn had “told a former business associate that economic sanctions against Russia would be ‘ripped up’” once Trump took office.
 - Rep. Cummings sent the letter to Gowdy and [asked](#) him to investigate these claims. Gowdy declined, insisting that the whistleblower falls under Mueller’s jurisdiction, and even pointed out that he had promised not to interfere in the special counsel’s investigation.
- **Failed to issue other subpoenas.** Cummings [asked](#) Gowdy to issue subpoenas for documents the House had requested from the White House and the Flynn Intelligence Group in March.
- **Obsessed over leaks.** Gowdy has [criticized](#) Mueller’s investigation over alleged leaks, saying, “it is kind of ironic that the people in charge of investigating the law and executing the law would violate the law.”
- **Played defense attorney for the administration.** Schiff has [accused](#) Gowdy “of playing defense attorney for the administration” after he made comments to Kushner during his testimony in front of the House Intelligence Committee that seemed to undermine the investigation itself. Gowdy [reminded](#) Kushner “that he was testifying voluntarily and could leave whenever he liked.”

Additional figures:

Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC)

Chairman, Senate Intelligence Committee

As chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Burr has expressed a wish to resolve the committee's investigation quickly, which may reflect pressure from Trump to do so. In November, Burr publicly admitted that President Trump had asked him to "conclude [the investigation] as quickly as possible." Trump reportedly made similar comments to other members of the Senate Intelligence Committee. In October 2017, Burr indicated he wanted to "wrap up" the investigation by February, even though the committee still had "a long list of witnesses to interview." Burr also suggested that if the investigation found no evidence of collusion, he would consider that conclusion unassailable, saying, "If there's evidence that there was something there, that will be laid out. If there's no evidence, how could anybody object to it?"

Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)

House Majority Leader

McCarthy has joined a cohort of fellow House GOP leaders who recognized the danger of Trump's ties to Russia before the election but did nothing about them. In June 2016, after he had already seen public reports confirming Russian government hackers attacked the Democratic National Committee, McCarthy said in a private meeting with other House Republicans, "There's two people I think Putin pays: Rohrabacher and Trump." McCarthy's comments, which came on the heels of a meeting with the Ukrainian Prime Minister who ["described a Kremlin tactic of financing populist politicians,"](#) prompted Speaker Ryan to tell those attending the meeting, "No leaks ... This is how we know we're a real family here."

Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL)

Gaetz was among the three lawmakers who [introduced](#) a measure calling special counsel Mueller "unfit to lead the probe" in November 2017. The objections in this measure stemmed from Mueller's previous professional relationship with Comey. He also [hijacked](#) efforts to get information from the Justice Department into President Trump's firing of former FBI Director James Comey.

Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ)

Biggs joined Gaetz and Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-TX) in [introducing](#) a measure questioning Mueller's fitness to lead the investigation.

Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-TX)

Gohmert joined Reps. Biggs and Gaetz [in introducing](#) a measure arguing that Mueller is unfit to conduct the investigation due to his previous professional relationship with Comey. Gohmert also questioned FBI Director Wray in December 2017 about the political biases held by FBI agents. These questions raised concerns that Gohmert was possibly suggesting [political tests](#) “to gauge the bureau’s loyalty to the Trump administration,” an idea that was [deemed](#) “totally inappropriate” by a former FBI counterintelligence agent.

Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL)

DeSantis has advocated for Mueller’s firing and [backed](#) a failed amendment “that would have curtailed Mueller’s probe within six months and limited its scope.” DeSantis has criticized Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein for appointing Mueller without limiting the probe. He has also publicly expressed hope that the House Investigation will end soon.

Rep. Roy Blunt (R-MO)

Blunt was one of several lawmakers whom Trump [reportedly](#) told “to end the investigation swiftly.” On board Air Force One, Trump also personally lobbied Blunt “to wrap up [the] investigation.” Blunt was reportedly unbothered by this situation.

Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA)

Goodlatte is the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and has blocked multiple [resolutions](#) of inquiry, including for documents related to the dismissal of former FBI Director James Comey. In this position, he and Rep. Gowdy [announced](#) a joint investigation of the Justice Department’s investigation into former Secretary of State Clinton’s private email server, drawing attention away from the Russian probe.

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR)

As noted by *The Washington Post*, Cotton has [exhibited](#) an “eagerness to run interference for the administration on Russia.” Cotton has [questioned](#) the veracity of reports of the interactions between Trump and Comey. Cotton [defended](#) Sessions and Kushner from criticism over their Russian contacts during the campaign, disputed reports that members of the Trump campaign were under investigation regarding their Russia contacts, and suggested that the Steele Dossier may have been funded by Russian intelligence. Cotton’s [insistence](#) that Trump’s statements “have been tougher on Russia than anything President Obama ever did” have raised particular concern amid reports that Trump may be considering [naming](#) Cotton as the director of the CIA.