Opinion



Former FBI Director James Comey testifies before a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election on Capitol Hill in Washington June 8, 2017. (CNS/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



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A New York Times article by Barry Berke, Noah Bookbinder and Norman L. Eisen provides strong evidence that President Donald Trump is guilty of obstruction of justice.

Let me highlight a few of the developments they mention. The president took aggressive steps to prevent Attorney General Jeff Sessions from recusing himself from the Russia investigation because he needed Sessions to protect him. The president drafted a letter to James Comey calling the investigation made up and politically motivated. The president worked on a statement on Air Force One to mislead the public concerning a meeting in Trump Tower between Donald Trump Jr., a Russian lawyer and others. One of Trump's spokesmen quit at this point because of his concern about possible obstruction of justice. There is also evidence that Special Counsel Robert Mueller can substantiate the memos of former FBI Director Comey concerning his interactions with the president and his subsequent firing. Finally, there is evidence of conspiracy with others in the White House who may have been cooperating with the president.

Regardless, now we are seeing Republicans in Congress going to extraordinary lengths to protect this president. They have submitted their first referral for criminal charges, and it is Christopher Steele, the British spy who prepared the controversial Trump dossier. Steele is also the only person currently involved in this probe who, when he saw potential criminal acts, went directly to the FBI with this information.

We are told that Hillary Clinton is now under investigation by the Justice Department . This investigation appears to be in direct response to the insistence of the president. So much for an independent judiciary.

Is this now truly the Trump Justice Department and Trump FBI? Is he in control of the levers of power and even of the Republican Congress? He can now order investigations into his political rivals and enemies. I think we do well to wonder just how damaging these actions can be to the fabric of our democracy.

Jason Sattler of USA Today elaborates on what Republicans are doing to protect the president. He notes that once Mueller was able to get the former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn to cooperate in the investigation, everything changed. Republicans began rushing to Trump's defense. Sen. Lindsay Graham switched from being an outspoken critic of the president to a cheerleader. Sessions, after recusing

himself, is now starting an investigation into Hillary Clinton. This is something he said he would not do. Rep. Devin Nunes of the House Intelligence Committee was not to be part of the investigation into Russia, but he has continued to obstruct the work of the committee and now seems bent on shutting the investigation down altogether.

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Sattler says unequivocally, "It's clear Republicans want this investigation crushed not because Mueller isn't finding any connections between the Trump campaign and the Putin regime, but because he is." He goes on to say he sees these connections involving Trump's inner circle and large sums of money.

Greg Sargent of The Washington Post wonders how far Republicans will go to prevent a full accounting of Russian interference in our election and what recourse the Democrats have.

Sargent focuses on Nunes: He was to have given up his leadership of the committee in the Russia investigation, but he hasn't. He has refused to issue subpoenas requested by Democrats though has issued some of his own. He has thwarted efforts to request necessary records and arrange for important interviews of relevant individuals.

The Democrats' recourse is to issue a minority report. Far from ideal, it would primarily focus on illustrating the ways in which Republicans have impeded this investigation. It would focus on questions they were unable to examine due to Republican obstruction. It would show just how far Republicans went to protect Trump and his closest advisors from accountability.

While this would be an important contribution to the ongoing discussion, it would continue to leave us a deeply divided country. Half of the country will believe the Republican report, while the other half will believe the minority report.

There is too much darkness surrounding the activities of the 2016 Trump campaign. It appears that only a Democratic sweep in the 2018 elections and open Congressional hearings, to include impeachment hearings, can bring light to the darkness.