

# Senate witch-hunters expand on their anti-Russia horror story

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6 October 2017

Speaking at a news conference Wednesday morning in Washington, the co-leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Republican Richard Burr of North Carolina and Democrat Mark Warner of Virginia, declared their agreement with the conclusions of an intelligence agency report issued last January 6 on alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

Like the CIA, FBI and NSA, the senators sought to portray the Russian government as a major threat to American democracy, employing an army of hackers, bots, trolls and other denizens of the Internet to influence American voters. Both conceded that there was no evidence of any tampering with the actual voting or its tabulation.

But Warner said there was a “larger consensus that [Russian operatives]” hacked into political files and released those files in an effort to influence the election.” Burr added, “Russian intelligence is determined, clever, and I reckon that every campaign official should take this seriously as we approach the coming elections.”

The Republican and Democrat claimed that the alleged Russian ads were aimed, not merely at influencing the outcome of the presidential election, but at stirring up social conflicts in America. Facebook ads purchased by Russian operatives “were indiscriminate” Burr said, adding that the “overall theme of Russia’s involvement in the US election was to create chaos at every level. They have been pretty darn successful.” Warner said the goal was to “sow chaos and drive division in our country,” and the Russians got “a decent rate of return” for their investments.

These comments were repeated and amplified throughout the American media Wednesday and Thursday as part of a systematic campaign to portray social unrest as the product, not of deteriorating

conditions of life and shocking catastrophes like Las Vegas, Puerto Rico or Hurricane Harvey, but of “outside agitators” based in Russia. The McCarthyite conclusion of this line of argument is that anyone drawing attention to the deeper social crisis of American capitalism is in the pay of Moscow.

Even if one were to accept the premise of the intelligence agencies—that the Russian government favored the election of Trump and devoted its cyber-propaganda efforts to bringing that about—the scale of the operation is ludicrously disproportionate to the supposed result.

A year of systematic combing through the activities of supposed Russian bots and trolls on Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms has uncovered a total expenditure of \$100,000 to place about 3,000 ads, few of them directly related to the choice of Clinton vs. Trump on November 8, 2016.

While according to the *Washington Post* these ads have been viewed ten million times, the vast majority of those views took place *after* the election, when a furious media campaign waged over alleged Russian interference created a higher degree of interest.

The supposed Russian interference was dwarfed in scale by the multibillion-dollar Clinton campaign, as well as the Trump campaign’s targeted voter suppression effort using the same medium—Facebook ads—to depress voter turnout among demographics thought likely to vote for Clinton, including African-Americans, young women and former supporters of Senator Bernie Sanders.

According to one report in the online publication *Medium*, the Trump campaign produced hundreds of thousands of digital ads and web sites, many of them not identified overtly with the candidate, to discourage potential Clinton voters. The Trump campaign spent

\$150 million in this voter suppression effort, 1,500 times more than the alleged Russian effort on his behalf.

As this example suggests, what passes for “democracy” in America is anything but. This is a country that, for more than a century after the Civil War, barred millions of African-American citizens from voting. It is a country where the theft of elections—whether by ballot-stuffing or physical intimidation of voters—was raised to the level of a political art form. The ultimate masterpiece of antidemocratic political corruption was produced in the 2000 election, when the Supreme Court stopped the counting of thousands of ballots and stole the election from Al Gore.

But we do not have sufficient space here for a full-scale history lesson. It is enough to say that the contemporary American electoral process is systematically manipulated by powerful corporate interests, which finance and control the Democratic and Republican parties and the US government at every level, federal, state and local.

Senator Warner represents the State of Virginia, whose political system is so thoroughly corrupt that it makes even nearby Delaware and New Jersey seem models of electoral integrity. To rise to the top of the smelly cesspool of Virginia’s Democratic Party politics, Warner deployed the millions of dollars he pocketed through the sale of his mobile phone company to Nextel in the 1990s. These resources enabled Warner to buy himself first the governorship of Virginia, and then the Senate seat he has occupied for two terms.

Warner is a fairly common type in the Congress. The electoral system in the United States is more thoroughly controlled by a narrow financial elite than that of any other purported democracy in the world. Two right-wing parties, devoted to safeguarding the wealth of the super-rich and the global interests of American imperialism, effectively exclude any other competitors from the electoral arena, in many cases through overt legal barriers that preclude third-party candidates or make their campaigns practically impossible. Third-party candidates are routinely denied media coverage and excluded from televised debates. They are denied ballot access in most states for failing to meet onerous requirements that do not apply to the Democrats and Republicans.

There are other equally antidemocratic features of the US electoral system, including, of course, the Electoral College, which made it possible for Trump to win the presidency although he trailed his Democratic opponent by three million votes overall. Voter ID laws enacted in two dozen states contributed significantly to Trump’s victory by disproportionately affecting pro-Democratic Party demographics, including elderly African-American voters and college students.

On Tuesday, the US Supreme Court heard arguments over partisan gerrymandering of congressional and state legislative districts, the notorious practice under which Republican or Democratic state governments—both parties are guilty, although the Republicans are currently more successful—draw electoral boundaries that make their legislative majorities virtually invulnerable to shifts in popular sentiment.

In the Wisconsin case heard by the court, Republicans drew state legislative maps so that large Democratic majorities were concentrated in a few districts, while smaller but secure Republican majorities were spread over more districts. With 48 percent of the vote, Republican candidates won 60 percent of the seats. “The result is preordained in most of the districts,” Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg observed at one point, going on to ask, “What becomes of the precious right to vote?”

The answer to the justice is straightforward: The right to vote in America is entirely subordinated to the interests of the capitalist ruling elite.



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