

Congressional Democrats push Russia probe, censorship

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Democratic Party leaders who will control the House of Representatives next January will use their new power to step up demands for censorship of the internet and other repressive measures flowing from the bogus allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Representative Adam Schiff, the incoming chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, told the *Wall Street Journal* that he would seek to explore avenues such as the possible financial relationship between the Trump Organization, the business entity that runs Trump's real estate and branding empire, and Russian businesses or individuals.

Schiff complained that under Republican leadership the committee had been "precluded from getting answers," adding that "there are entire investigative threads which the Republicans refused to pursue because they thought it too threatening to the president."

In an appearance Sunday on the ABC interview program "This Week," Schiff denounced the appointment of Matt Whitaker as acting attorney general, claiming that anyone occupying the top leadership position in the Justice Department had to have previous Senate confirmation, which Whitaker, as the chief of staff of the department, did not.

He said that besides constitutional and legal obstacles to the appointment, "the biggest flaw from my point of view is that he was chosen for the purpose of interfering with the Mueller investigation." As a conservative pundit, before going to work at the Department of Justice, Whitaker had denounced the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian government during the 2016 elections.

The statements are a continuation of the strategy of

the Democrats to focus their opposition to the Trump administration not on the basis of its fascistic attacks on immigrants or its right-wing policies, but on its supposed subservience to Russia.

Schiff also criticized Trump for distancing himself from a CIA assessment—made public by the *Washington Post* in its Sunday edition—that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was personally responsible for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a critic of the Saudi ruler who was also a *Post* columnist. "The president needs to listen to what our intelligence community has to say, what our best professionals' assessment is," he declared.

At the same time, Schiff was at pains to reaffirm the US support for the brutal Saudi monarchy, adding, "The danger to the US is ... if we act too precipitously and the House of Saud should fall, that would be completely destabilizing of the region and we don't know what would follow."

Another leading House Democrat, Elijah Cummings, who will chair the House Government Oversight Committee in January, appeared on the CBS Sunday interview program "Face the Nation" to raise the same concerns about the appointment of Whitaker and the likelihood that Trump might shut down or hamstring the Mueller investigation.

He told interviewer Margaret Brennan that if the Department of Justice sought to block the public release of Mueller's findings, he would seek to subpoena the Mueller report and then make it public. "I would do anything and everything in my power to have ... the findings presented to not only to the Congress, but to the people of the United States. I think it's very important."

In a further effort to revive the anti-Russia campaign, four Democratic senators sent a letter Friday to

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, asking him to provide details of lobbying activities and retaliatory action against political critics of the huge social media platform. The letter was sparked by a lengthy front-page report by the *New York Times* claiming that Facebook had withheld details of alleged political activity on its pages by Russian entities and agents during the 2016 elections.

The senators' letter was then made public in the pages of the *Times*, as the Democrats and their chief media voice engaged in a tag-team effort to pressure Facebook to move more aggressively in censoring and shutting down dissident voices on its platform, particularly those criticizing the Democratic Party from the left.

Senator Amy Klobuchar, one of the four Democratic senators, told the *Times*, "We need to know if Facebook, or any entity affiliated with or hired by Facebook, ever used any of the vast financial and data resources available to them to retaliate against their critics, including elected officials who were scrutinizing them."

The attempts to revive the flagging anti-Russia campaign come after a midterm election in which there was not the slightest evidence of significant foreign intervention, despite incessant claims by the Democrats and their media supporters that Russia—now allegedly joined by China and Iran—was seeking to rig the results of the congressional vote.

The Democratic Party, the supposed target of the attack, instead made its largest gains in the House of Representatives since the Watergate election of 1974, capturing at least 41 Republican-held seats, and losing only three Democratic-held seats, for a net gain of at least 38. The incoming House will be divided 233-202 if three still undecided seats go to the Republicans, who currently hold narrow leads.

The final contests for the US Senate and state governorships were settled over the weekend. Republican Brian Kemp was certified as governor-elect of Georgia, with his Democratic opponent Stacey Abrams conceding she could not overcome a deficit of more than 50,000 votes or force a runoff.

In Florida, Republicans claimed the statehouse and the US Senate seat for Ron DeSantis and Rick Scott, after machine recounts and, in the case of a Senate seat an additional partial hand recount, failed to

significantly reduce the narrow leads they held over their Democratic opponents, Andrew Gillum and Senator Bill Nelson. Both Democrats conceded defeat.

The Republican Party retains control of the US Senate with a 52-47 majority, with the remaining seat to be decided by a runoff election in Mississippi on November 27 in which Republican incumbent Cynthia Hyde-Smith is heavily favored.



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