

“They write politics, we write government”

THE OTHER BOMBSHELL FROM LAST NIGHT

Lost in the ether between the [appointment of a special prosecutor](#) and the knowledge of deep, [undisclosed ties between the Trump Campaign and the Russian Government](#) and the fact that Trump chose his NSA director with [full knowledge of his foreign ties](#), a Washington Post story [detailing a meeting among GOP House Leadership](#) hasn't received as much oxygen. There has even been significant criticism of the reporting – many have said that the Post should have accepted the explanation that the recording was a joke. The Post clearly stated that the recording had significant laughter, and included six instances of laughter in the transcript posted, but I digress. I don't like the idea of posting internal meeting recordings without the knowledge of the participants – so easy to take what is said out of context. But hey, we have this, and I think we can really learn a lot from it about how GOP leadership was thinking about Russian interaction with the Western world.

[Cathy McMorris-]Rodgers [4th ranking House GOP]: How are things going in Ukraine?

[Paul] Ryan: Well the Russians are bombing them...[Ukrainian PM] has this really interesting riff about...people have said they have Ukraine fatigue, and it's really Russian fatigue because what Russia is doing to us, financing our populists, financing people in our governments to undo our governments...all the things Russia does to basically blow up our country...

To set the scene: Kevin McCarthy, the House Majority Leader has just met with the Ukrainian PM,

Volodymyr Groysman, who they refer to as “a reformer.” He has replaced a line of Russian or corruptions-tainted leaders. This looks like a fairly simple read-out of what happened in the meeting, and a recognition of the Russian threat.

Rodgers: My big takeaway from that trip was just how sophisticated the propaganda...

Ryan: It's very sophisticated.

Rodgers: ...coming out of Russia

Ryan: Very sophisticated.

Rodgers: Not just in Ukraine. They were once funding NGOs in Europe...I hadn't tuned into Russian TV until this trip. It's, it's frightening.

Ryan: So he's saying they're doing this throughout Europe...

Remembering that I haven't heard the transcript and therefore don't know the tone – but it sounds like Rodgers and Ryan are very concerned with Russian actions. Also of note is that it is clear already to the GOP leadership that they know Russia has a wide-ranging plan to destabilize Western governments.

Ryan: And guess...guess who's the only one taking a strong stand up against it? We are.

Rodgers: We're not...we're not...but we're not

McCarthy: [Unintelligible] I'll guarantee you that's what it is...The Russians hacked the DNC and got the oppo research they had on Trump [laughs]

Again, very interesting. Everybody in the room is aware of the intelligence operation being run against Western elections, including our own. Ryan seems to understand the importance of “taking a strong stand” – but this doesn’t comport well with their consistent use of the Russia-generated opposition research against Hillary Clinton and other Democratic candidates. It’s fully understandable why they believed this would help them win the election – but this is not exactly an evidence of country over party.

Ryan: The Russian’s hacked the DNC...[to get opposition research]...on Trump and like delivered it to...to who?

McCarthy: There’s, there’s two people, I think Putin pays: Rohrbacher and Trump...[laughter]...swear to God.

Now, there are two things here which I think the Washington Post did interpret badly. The implication of the story – and the places where it was quoted – is that “pays” has the traditional meaning: give money to. But reading the entire transcript, it seems clear to me that McCarthy means “pay” in political capital – the aforementioned opposition research. I do not take this to mean that actual bags of cash were handed over – but that doesn’t mean people weren’t paid.

Second, it seems clear that McCarthy was joking, just like he said. But to me **the joke goes the other way**. I wasn’t in the room – but the way I read this is not that he is joking, there is no way Trump is being paid. Rather, it is so obvious that Trump will be the beneficiary of Russia’s actions that it’s funny to say it out loud.

Ryan: This is an off the record...[laughter]...NO LEAKS...[laughter]...alright? [Laughter] This is how we know we’re a real family here.

[Steve] Scalise [Majority Whip]: That’s how you know that we’re tight. [Laughter]

Ryan: What’s said in the family stays in the family.

Read the rest of this in the context of my interpretation of the joke. The GOP House Leadership knows (or at least presumes likely; at this point I don’t think the intelligence was yet clear) that Russia has access to the DNC’s emails. They know that the purpose of this hack was to destabilize the US democratic institutions. Trump is so certain to be the beneficiary that to point this fact out is, apparently, hilarious.

Do they raise alarm? With Trump, the FBI, the press, anybody?

No – they lend credence to Russia’s program by using the hacked emails in the election.

[Note: as I was getting ready to publish, I came across [this article by Digby](#) at Salon. It raises yet another troubling fact that is still consistent with the McCarthy-joke story. This conversation was from a year ago – when the nation’s focus wasn’t transfixed on the topic of Trump-Russia. Today – laughing about Russia installing their preferred candidate as our President is all a good jest. Ryan and McCarthy were already there a full year ago?]