

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEWS

Nunes' nothingburger

Gertrude Stein once said of her hometown of Oakland, California, "There is no there there." That about says it for Devin Nunes' notorious memo, too.

By this I do not mean that Nunes, R-Calif., chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, has uncovered no potential wrongdoing in his 3 1/2-page memo, which was declassified Friday over vehement objections from senior FBI and Justice Department officials. More about the possible wrongdoing in a moment.

The important questions, however, are: First, did the FBI have solid reasons to suspect that people in Donald Trump's campaign had unusual, dangerous and possibly criminal ties to Moscow?

Second, did this suspicion warrant surveillance and investigation by the FBI?

The answers are yes and yes, and nothing in the Nunes memo changes that — except to provide the president with a misleading pretext to fire deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein and discredit Robert Mueller's probe.

Let's review. Paul Manafort, the Trump campaign chairman until August 2016, is credibly alleged to have received \$12.7 million in "undisclosed cash payments" from then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, a Russian stooge. Had Manafort not been exposed, he might have gone on to occupy a position of trust in the Trump administration, much as Reagan campaign manager Bill Casey wound up running the CIA. He would then have been easy prey to Russian blackmail.

George Papadopoulos, the young adviser who pleaded guilty last year to lying to the FBI, spent his time on the campaign trying to make overtures to Russia. In May 2016 he blabbed to an Australian diplomat that Moscow had political dirt on Hillary Clinton — information that proved true and was passed on to U.S. intelligence. This was the genesis of an FBI counterintelligence investigation, as the Nunes memo itself admits.

And then there's Carter Page, the man at the center of the Nunes memo. By turns stupid (his Ph.D. thesis was twice rejected), self-important (he has compared himself to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.), and money-hungry (a suspected Russian agent who tried to recruit him in 2013 was recorded saying he "got hooked on Gazprom"), Page happens also to be highly sympathetic to the Putin regime. The Russian phrase for such characters is *polezni durak* — useful idiot. No wonder he was invited to give a commencement speech at a Russian university in summer 2016. That's how assets are cultivated in the world of intelligence.

Given the profile and his relative proximity to team Trump, it would have been professionally negligent of the FBI not to keep tabs on him. Yet the bureau obtained a surveillance warrant only after Page had left the campaign and shortly before the election, and it insisted throughout the campaign that Trump was not a target of investigation. How that represents an affront to American democracy is anyone's guess.

The memo does seem to have uncovered conflicts of interest at the Justice Department, most seriously by then-Associate Deputy Attorney General Bruce Ohr, whose wife was working for Fusion GPS (and thus, by extension, the Clinton

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campaign) on opposition research on Trump. The memo also claims this relationship was not disclosed to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court when the Justice Department applied for a surveillance warrant on Page.

That's a significant omission that already seems to have led to Ohr's demotion, according to Fox News. Then again, the Nunes memo has its own "material omissions," according to an adamant and enraged FBI. Who do you find more credible: Nunes or FBI Director Christopher Wray?

Nor does the Nunes memo claim that the information provided by the FBI to the foreign intelligence court was, in fact, false. The closest it gets is a quote from ex-FBI Director James Comey saying the Steele dossier was "salacious and unverified," and then noting the anti-Trump bias of various officials involved in the case.

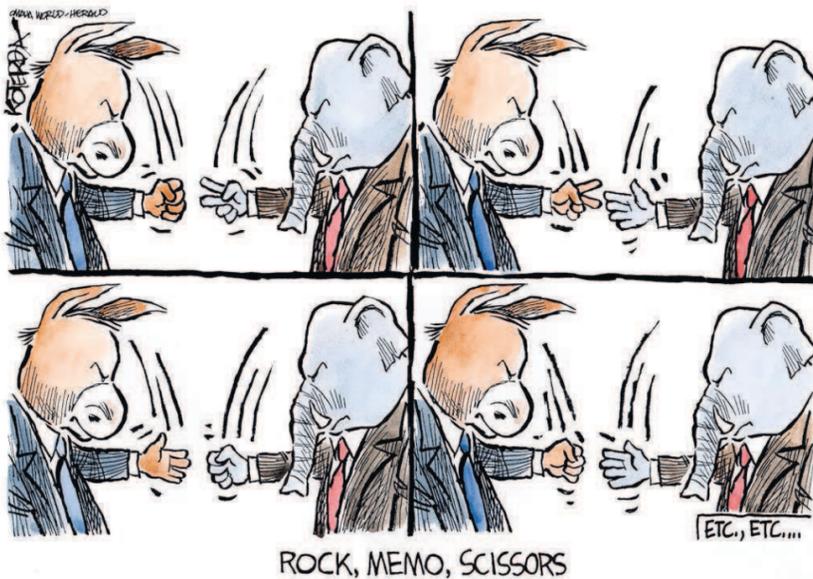
Come again? The Stormy Daniels story is also salacious and almost certainly accurate. "Unverified" is not a synonym for "untrue." And since when do pundits who make a living from their opinions automatically equate "bias" with dishonesty?

The larger inanity here is the notion that the FBI tried to throw the election to Clinton, when it was the Democrats who complained bitterly at the time that the opposite was true.

"It has become clear that you possess explosive information about close ties and coordination between Donald Trump, his top advisers and the Russian government," Harry Reid, then the Senate minority leader, angrily wrote to James Comey in late October 2016. "The public has a right to know this information."

Maybe so. But the G-Men kept quiet about their investigations, and Trump won the election. How that represents evidence of a sinister deep-state conspiracy is a question for morons to ponder. As for Devin Nunes, he has, to adapt an old line, produced evidence of a conspiracy so small. In modern parlance we'd call it a nothingburger, but the bun is missing, too.

Bret Stephens in a columnist for the *New York Times*.



B2H: Where are the benefits?

Mitch Colburn has a terrible job. He's paid to make Idaho Power's B2H transmission line sound like a good project, good for Umatilla County, good for all of Oregon. Because there's nothing good to say, he labels critics' facts as "opinions," which he responds to with "information," mostly the company's public relations window dressing.

Where is Mr. Colburn's information about benefits? Jobs: None. Additional energy delivered to Umatilla County: None.

Here's his information: Some transmission towers will be only 140 feet high, not 190. That's a benefit? In special places, clear cuts will be only 150 feet wide, not 250. Another benefit? Only half as many access roads will be needed. That's a mere 200 roads, not 400. To protect views of the Oregon Trail in Baker County, towers will be painted brown so shining steel won't be so obnoxious. Do we all feel better now? Not likely.

These 140- to 190-foot towers, planted on clear cuts as wide as eight-lane highways, will scar the skylines of five eastern Oregon

counties from the Idaho border to Boardman, Oregon. That's information, not opinion.

Idaho Power has been meeting with stake holders and property owners. Yes. In La Grande more than 300 people have turned out. Every person in attendance said "No" to the B2H. Why? Because the B2H will cross prime farm land, endanger ecosystems, invade private property and impact the Oregon Trail. That's information, not opinion.

The "need" for the controversial B2H, whether it should be built at all, is currently being analyzed by the Oregon Public Utilities Commission. Idaho Power has been proposing this line since 2007. Is that good? No. In the last 10 years the electric utility industry has changed as much as the telephone industry. Trade publications use terms like "dramatic changes," "tectonic shifts" and "death spiral" to describe the industry's shift away from transmission lines. Idaho Power is still pursuing the same old plans to build the B2H — the equivalent of telephone poles for landlines — while in Iowa, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Oregon long-planned transmission line projects, once deemed

"essential," have been canceled. That's information, not opinion.

Mr. Colburn has a terrible job. Yes. That's my opinion.

Lois Barry
La Grande

Is BMCC rodeo arena best use of money?

Why is so much money, possibly upwards of \$10-12 million, being spent on a rodeo venture at the Pendleton Blue Mountain Community College? I understand that it would help the college animal science program, but why something this big, and expensive, and this dependent on county and city for future use? BMCC isn't about Pendleton Round-Up or rodeos. BMCC surely isn't about being a tourist attraction or fundraiser for the city. It is only a community college.

BMCC is about education. It is a community college for students to either earn a degree for great employment or credits to enter into a college of higher learning. A community college is available for everyone in the Umatilla County area.

Republicans and those 'attacks' on the FBI

The news is filled with reports that Republicans in Washington are "attacking" the FBI over the Trump-Russia investigation.

The *Washington Post* recently compiled a collection of statements by GOP lawmakers under the heading "Republicans launch attack after attack on the FBI." The *New York Times* ran a news analysis headlined "Trump's Unparalleled War on a Pillar of Society: Law Enforcement."

Those words have been echoed many, many times by various talking heads on television.

But have Republicans really been attacking the FBI? The bureau is a big organization — about 35,000 people. It does many different things. A more accurate way to describe what Republicans are doing is that they are condemning the FBI leadership's handling of two of the most heavily politicized investigations in years — the Trump-Russia probe and the Hillary Clinton email investigation. All that proves is that when law enforcement wades into politics, it becomes the target of sometimes intense political criticism.

That is an entirely different thing from attacking the FBI as an institution or attacking the role it plays in government.

The FBI does enormously valuable, sometimes heroic things. It breaks up terrorist rings and catches killers and bank robbers and kidnappers and embezzlers and all sorts of bad actors in our society. It investigates complex crimes that victimize large numbers of Americans. Its agents sometimes give their lives to protect the public.

The FBI has a Hall of Honor that recognizes agents who have been killed in the line of duty. Thirty-six agents have been killed "as the result of a direct adversarial force or at or by the hand of an adversary." The most recent was murdered in 2008 while executing an arrest warrant on violent drug traffickers in Pennsylvania.

Another 30 FBI employees are honored for having died in the performance of their duty, although not necessarily in direct confrontation with a criminal. The most

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recent are several who contracted serious illnesses while aiding recovery efforts in Washington, New York and Pennsylvania immediately after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

That kind of selflessness and dedication is clearly not what Republicans are criticizing.

What Republicans are condemning is the FBI leadership's conduct in the Trump and Clinton probes. For example, in the case

of the much-discussed House Intelligence Committee memo released last week, Republicans (accurately) portrayed an FBI leadership that made common cause with an opposition research project paid for by the Hillary Clinton campaign right in the middle of a 2016 presidential election — and then ferociously resisted congressional oversight. An agency that does that can expect some criticism, if its actions ever come to light.

"It's quite obvious that the Intelligence Committee is only questioning the decisions made by a small number of FBI officials at the highest levels," said committee spokesman Jack Langer. "In fact, we've been hearing from a large number of FBI employees, both active and retired, who have asked us to continue the oversight work we're doing."

For all the good it does, the FBI has made some horrendous mistakes. After the post-9/11 anthrax attacks, for example, the bureau focused its search for the perpetrator on an Army scientist named Steven Hatfill. There was a lot of pressure on the FBI to solve the case, and there was a lot of headquarters involvement. But Hatfill was innocent. Nevertheless, the FBI chased him relentlessly, destroying his reputation and ability to make a living. Only after years did the FBI turn toward another suspect, who killed himself before charges could be filed. The FBI had to pay Hatfill millions in damages.

The bureau, led by then-director Robert Mueller, didn't seem terribly sorry about it. When the Justice Department "formally exonerated Hatfill, and paid him \$5.82 million in a legal settlement," columnist Carl Cannon wrote last year, "Mueller could not be bothered to walk across the street to attend the press conference announcing the case's resolution. When reporters did ask him about it, Mueller was graceless. 'I do not apologize for any aspect of the investigation,' he said, adding that it would be erroneous 'to say there were mistakes.'"

Today Mueller is, of course, the special counsel investigating the Trump-Russia affair. But one could list a number of other non-heroic episodes under different directors in the bureau's history, starting with the first, J. Edgar Hoover.

So the FBI has deserved its share of criticism over the years. And that goes double when the bureau intrudes into politics. So no, Republicans are not attacking the FBI writ large. But when the nation's premier investigative agency, with all its formidable law enforcement powers, jumps in the middle of hot political disputes, no one should be surprised when things get political.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

The cost of attending BMCC is ridiculously expensive as it is. The cost of credits alone is increasing from \$97 per credit to \$104 per credit this coming year!

"Lack of funding at the state level forces community colleges to place an unfair burden on the backs of students in the form of tuition increases," a news release from BMCC stated. Put your knee high boots on because the cow poop is getting deep!

Why not use the above money BMCC President Cam Preus has such wonderful future spending plans for; why not invest money into county grants for all the students that depend on getting degrees through BMCC and are residents of our county to help cover classroom literature for example? BMCC is Blue Mountain Community College, not a Blue Mountain Pendleton Round-Up Rodeo Event Grounds to rent out and a college rodeo team. The community, since it includes a BMCC located in the Hermiston area also, is about community of Umatilla County, not just one city and is not supposed to be involved in the tourist business. I'm just sayin'.

Bernie Sanderson
Hermiston