

Fake news does not just fall like rain from heaven. In its most dangerous form, fake news is weaponized for effect—usually, political effect.

Vladimir Putin's regime in Russia made weaponized fake news a core element of its political manipulation throughout the former Soviet Union and the modern European Union, revving up public ire over rapes that never happened, for instance; planting fake material in politicians' laptops and social media that can then be "exposed," and broadcasting false political propaganda. This phenomenon has been documented in Chairman GRAHAM's recent hearing in our Crime and Terrorism Judiciary Subcommittee, featuring, among other sources, the Center for Strategic and International Studies' "Kremlin Playbook," and it has been documented throughout the proceedings of this year's McCain Institute Sedona Forum. Because of this history of political manipulation, the Putin regime's interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election ought to be a wakeup call for America.

Weaponized fake news requires a delivery system, and here is where this connects to climate change. In America, we are particularly vulnerable to such election interference because a robust delivery system for weaponized fake news already exists. Putin doesn't need to build a fake news delivery system in America. The fossil fuel industry already did. Climate denial was the original fake news. They have been at it awhile.

A decade ago, a peer-reviewed academic study of the climate denial apparatus described how this works. The fossil fuel industry sets up an array of "environmental skeptics." But of course they are not just skeptics; they in reality "are predominantly agents of conservative think tanks." These think tanks, in turn, have the "essential role" of providing what the report calls "political insulation for industry," including "for companies such as ExxonMobil". Again quoting this report, the "defining feature" of this apparatus is the "denial of the authenticity of environmental problems." Collectively, this climate denial apparatus creates for the fossil fuel industry "a full scale counter movement" against environmental science. Concluding in the report, "Its major tactic is to manufacture uncertainty."

The Center for Strategic and International Studies' "Kremlin Playbook" report, by comparison, describes Russia's fake news tactic as "to disseminate erroneous information that fosters public confusion." To manufacture uncertainty, "to disseminate erroneous information that fosters public confusion"—do you see the similarity?

If we collapse into fewer words these decade-old findings about the fossil fuel industry climate denial apparatus, here is what you have: front groups who disguise the identity of the real actors and pump out fake news—in their case, the fake news of climate denial.

The tactics and methods of climate science denial are the tactics and methods of weaponized fake news: false front organizations, hidden funding sources, controllable means of communication, mimicry of legitimate groups, personal disparagement of opponents, relentless repetition of lies, and shameless persistence when debunked. You could say that the fake news propagation we face today in America metastasized from climate denial. Climate denial was the original "School for Scoundrels" in these fake news techniques.

To put financial scale to this, Putin's Russia has a \$200 billion annual budget. With that, they funded a significant weaponized fake news effort to influence our Presidential election. But the fossil fuel industry has a \$2 trillion annual budget. The fossil fuel industry fights to protect an annual subsidy in the United States estimated by the International Monetary Fund to be \$700 billion. With stakes like that, the climate denial delivery system the fossil fuel industry could profitably set up in the United States can be very robust and complex, and it is.

Fake news, dark money, and hidden political spending have been the fossil fuel industry's primary political weapons. This creates the problem. Once a fake news delivery system is in place, that system will not necessarily differentiate between different types or sources of fake news. Once that road is open, anyone can travel it with any fake news cargo. The same fake news delivery system that will distribute fake news designed to manipulate American politics for the fossil fuel industry can just as effectively distribute fake news designed to manipulate American elections for Russia or China or Iran. The fake news delivery system is not restricted to any one payload.

The fossil fuel industry also fought hard to create the dark money political spending apparatus that now despoils American politics. They lobbied the Supreme Court for the wretched Citizens United decision. They saw it coming and they were swift at the mark, and they have stopped any effort in Congress at political spending disclosure. They need and depend on dark money to buy influence in Congress.

Here, the problem is the same. Once you tolerate a dark money political spending apparatus in American politics, that dark money apparatus will be just as good at hiding the hand of Vladimir Putin or China or Iran as it is at hiding the hand of the fossil fuel industry. Darkness is darkness, whether it is Charles and David Koch or Vladimir Putin operating in that darkness.

The dangers of fake news, dark money, climate science denial, and foreign interference in our elections are thus all tied together, and they call for an American response. Politics is a battlefield, and dark money and fake news are now assets for our Nation's enemies.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for adjournment occur following the remarks of the Democratic leader.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FBI INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in a week full of revelation after revelation, on a day when we thought things couldn't get any worse, they have. I was shaken by the report in the New York Times that alleged that the President tried to shut down an active FBI investigation into a close political associate, and we are only 1 day removed from stunning allegations that the President may have divulged classified information to a known adversary.

Concerns about our national security, the rule of law, the independence of our Nation's highest law enforcement agencies are mounting. The country is being tested in unprecedented ways.

I say to all of my colleagues in the Senate: History is watching.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 9:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 6:15 p.m., adjourned until Wednesday, May 17, 2017, at 9:30 a.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION

BRIAN D. QUINTENZ, OF OHIO, TO BE A COMMISSIONER OF THE COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION FOR A TERM EXPIRING APRIL 13, 2020, VICE SCOTT O'MALIA, RESIGNED.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

KEVIN ALLEN HASSETT, OF MASSACHUSETTS, TO BE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISERS, VICE JASON FURMAN.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

DEREK KAN, OF CALIFORNIA, TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION FOR POLICY, VICE BLAIR ANDERSON.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

DAN R. BROUILLETTE, OF TEXAS, TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF ENERGY, VICE ELIZABETH SHERWOOD-RANDALL.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

SUSAN PARKER BODINE, OF MARYLAND, TO BE AN ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, VICE CYNTHIA GILES.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

JAMES DONOVAN, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY, VICE SARAH BLOOM RASKIN.