

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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July 20, 2023

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray  
Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20535

Dear Director Wray:

On July 17, 2023, the Committee conducted a transcribed interview of Laura Dehmlow, the Section Chief of the FBI's Foreign Influence Task Force (FITF). During her transcribed interview, Dehmlow revealed that the same FBI personnel who were warning social media companies about a potential Russian "hack and leak" operation in the run-up to the 2020 election knew that the laptop belonging to Hunter Biden was not Russian disinformation. After the *New York Post* broke a story based on the contents of the laptop about Biden family influence peddling,<sup>1</sup> the FBI made the institutional decision to refuse to answer direct questions from social media companies about the laptop's authenticity—despite months of constant information sharing up to that time. Put simply, after the FBI conditioned social media companies to believe that the laptop was the product of a hack-and-dump operation, the Bureau stopped its information sharing, allowing social media companies to conclude that the *New York Post* story was Russian disinformation.

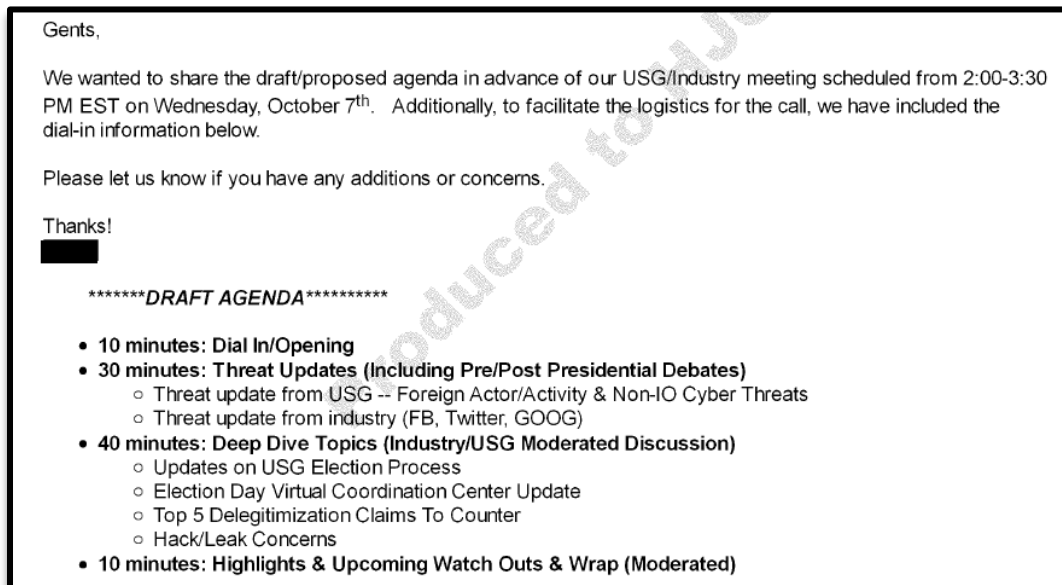
According to information available to the Committee, the FBI confirmed the authenticity of Hunter Biden's laptop in November 2019 and gained possession of the laptop in December 2019.<sup>2</sup> In the nine months leading up to the 2020 election, the FBI met over 30 times with social media platforms—all while in possession of Hunter Biden's laptop. Prior to the election, FBI Special Agent Elvis Chan scheduled, on behalf of FITF, at least five meetings with Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Yahoo!, in addition to multiple meetings with Twitter and Reddit. Between May and November 2020, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) hosted at least nine "USG-Industry" meetings, including four meetings in October 2020 alone. Representatives from the FBI, including Agent Chan, routinely participated in these "USG-Industry" meetings. In one meeting on October 7, 2020—just one week before the *New York Post* article on the Hunter

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<sup>1</sup> Emma-Jo Morris and Gabrielle Fonrouge, *Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian businessman to VP dad*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 14, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> House Ways and Means Committee's Transcribed Interview of Gary A. Shapley, Jr., at 12.

Biden laptop was published—the agenda explicitly listed “Hack/Leak Concerns” as an item of discussion.<sup>3</sup>



The Committee recently conducted a transcribed interview of current FITF Section Chief Laura Dehmlow who testified that, by October 14, 2020—the day the *Post* published its story on the contents of Hunter Biden’s laptop—the individual then-serving as FITF Section Chief, Bradley Benavides, as well as individuals assigned to FITF’s Russia Unit knew that Hunter Biden’s laptop was real.<sup>4</sup> Dehmlow also testified that the FBI could—and did—share information with companies regarding foreign malign influence operations, like hack-and-leak operations, including those conducted by Russia-aligned actors.<sup>5</sup>

The *Post* published its story early in the morning on October 14.<sup>6</sup> That same day, representatives from FITF attended a previously scheduled meeting with Twitter, during which a Twitter employee asked the FITF about the authenticity of laptop.<sup>7</sup> According to Section Chief Dehmlow’s testimony, an analyst in the FBI’s Criminal Investigative Division embedded in FITF began to respond that the laptop was real, when an FBI lawyer interrupted to say that the FBI had “no further comment,” regarding the laptop’s provenance:

Q. Are you familiar with the October 2020 *New York Post* story on Hunter Biden’s laptop?

<sup>3</sup> E-mail from Facebook employee to Matthew Masterson and Brian Scully (Sept. 29, 2020, 11:41 AM) (on file with the Comm.).

<sup>4</sup> House Judiciary Committee’s Transcribed Interview of Laura Dehmlow (July 17, 2023), at 37 (on file with the Comm.).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 173-74.

<sup>6</sup> Morris and Fonrouge, *supra* note 1.

<sup>7</sup> House Judiciary Committee’s Transcribed Interview of Laura Dehmlow (July 17, 2023), at 29 (on file with the Comm.).

A. I am.

Q. Do you recall whether any of these social media companies you were meeting with asked you any questions about it?

A. I do.

Q. And what is your recollection? Who –

A. So, I remember having a conversation with or being involved in a conversation with Twitter, and I honestly can't recall if this was repeated to me – I might have been a few minutes late to the meeting – or if – or if I was – I actually overheard it. But it was – it was relayed to me later that somebody from Twitter – I don't recall who. I'm not sure who. **Somebody from Twitter essentially asked whether the laptop was real. And one of the FBI folks who was on the call did confirm that, "yes, it was," before another participant jumped in and said, "no further comment."**

Q. Do you recall who from the FBI said it was real?

A. I do.

Q. And who was that?

A. It's a non-[Senior Executive Service] employee. I'd have to take that back.<sup>8</sup>

Following the meeting with Twitter, FBI personnel immediately deliberated internally about what information about the laptop the FBI would reveal to social media companies when asked in upcoming meetings.<sup>9</sup> According to Dehmlow, during these internal deliberations the decision was made that FITF would say "no comment" going forward.<sup>10</sup> However, on the instruction of FBI counsel during the transcribed interview, Dehmlow refused to answer which FBI official made the decision that FITF would say "no comment" going forward, except to state that it "was not [her] decision. It wasn't [her] final call."<sup>11</sup>

Later on October 14, FITF met with Facebook. During the FITF-Facebook meeting, Dehmlow responded to a similar question from a Facebook employee about Hunter Biden's laptop by stating that the FBI, again, had "no comment."<sup>12</sup> The FBI made this decision despite

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<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 29 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 31–32.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 33–34, 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 33.

being in possession of the laptop and having confirmed its authenticity. According to Dehmlow, multiple personnel on FITF knew that the laptop was real. She testified:

Q. Do you know who else at FITF knew that the laptop was real?

A. I don't actually. I would assume both my – yes, I would certainly say that [then-FITF Section Chief] Brad Benavides was aware.

Q. What about the individuals on the Russia unit?

A. I would assume the unit chief was also aware. I'm pretty certain of that fact.

Q. For the individual –

DOJ Counsel: Just to clarify, do you know to a certainty that they were aware, or are you just making deductions?

A. I'm pretty certain that they were aware.<sup>13</sup>

In the hours following publication of the *Post*'s story, Twitter blocked the story from being shared,<sup>14</sup> while Facebook deamplified the story, significantly reducing its circulation and prevalence in users' newsfeeds.<sup>15</sup> As the federal court in *Missouri v. Biden* explained in damning language, the FBI's actions prevented millions of Americans from having a clear understanding about a salient issue in the 2020 presidential election:

The FBI's failure to alert social-media companies that the Hunter Biden laptop was real, and not mere Russian disinformation, is particularly troubling. The FBI had the laptop in their possession since December 2019 and had warned social-media companies to look for a "hack and dump" operation by the Russians prior to the 2020 election. Even after Facebook specifically asked whether the Hunter Biden laptop story was Russian disinformation, Dehmlow of the FBI refused to comment, resulting in the social-media companies' suppression of the story. As a result, millions of U.S. citizens did not hear the story prior to the November 3, 2020 election.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 37.

<sup>14</sup> *See, e.g.*, Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi), Twitter (Dec. 2, 2022, 7:08 PM), <https://twitter.com/mtaibbi/status/1598831435288563712>.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Golding, *Zuckerberg says Facebook censored The Post's Hunter Biden stories because FBI warned of Russian misinfo 'dump'*, N.Y. POST (Aug. 26, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> *Missouri v. Biden*, No. 3:22-cv-01213 (W.D. La. Jul. 4, 2023), ECF No. 293, at 107 (memorandum ruling granting preliminary injunction).

Prior to the presidential election on November 3, 2020, the FBI never formally revealed that the laptop was “real” and in the FBI’s possession. As Dehmlow testified to the Committee, had the Hunter Biden story been a product of an actual Russian disinformation campaign, FITF would have been fully authorized to warn the companies of such a campaign: “But if there is a foreign malign influence operation and we’ve got specific details about how those actors are propagating information operations, influence operations on platforms, that’s something we could share the specific details of.”<sup>17</sup> Instead, the refusal of FBI officials—the very officials who knew the laptop was real—to verify the authenticity of the laptop allowed widespread censorship about an otherwise accurate news story.

In light of the new information, please provide to the Committee the following information, which are necessary for the Committee to conduct oversight of the FBI:

1. The name of the FBI official affiliated with FITF who, according to Section Chief Dehmlow’s testimony, responded first to the question from Twitter regarding the authenticity of Hunter Biden’s laptop during the October 2020 FITF-Twitter meeting.
2. The name of the FBI official affiliated with FITF who, according to Section Chief Dehmlow’s testimony, responded second to the question from Twitter regarding the authenticity of the Hunter Biden’s laptop, and said that the FBI had “no further comment” during the October 2020 FITF-Twitter meeting.
3. A list of FBI employees who participated in the deliberations following the meeting between FITF and Twitter in October 2020 about how to respond to questions about the authenticity of Hunter Biden’s laptop.
4. A list of FBI employees affiliated with FITF who were aware, at any point prior to October 14, 2020, that the FBI was in possession of Hunter Biden’s laptop and/or that the FBI had confirmed the authenticity of the Hunter Biden laptop.
5. The name of the FBI official or officials who decided on October 14, 2020 that FITF must respond “no comment” when asked by social media companies for additional information regarding the authenticity of Hunter Biden’s laptop.
6. All records, notes, and other documents, including but not limited to records retained by Sentinel, of meetings between or among FITF or the San Francisco Field Office and social media companies, including Meta, Twitter, Alphabet, Microsoft, Apple, Reddit, and Yahoo, from January 1, 2017, to the present.
7. All documents and communications transmitted via Signal between or among FITF or the San Francisco Field Office and social media companies, including Meta, Twitter, Alphabet, Microsoft, Apple, Reddit, and Yahoo, from January 1, 2017, to the present.

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<sup>17</sup> House Judiciary Committee’s Transcribed Interview of Laura Dehmlow at 174 (on file with the Comm.).

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray

July 20, 2023

Page 6

8. All documents and communications sent or received via Teleporter link between or among FITF or the San Francisco Field Office and American social media companies, including Meta, Twitter, Alphabet, Microsoft, Apple, Reddit, and Yahoo, from January 1, 2017, to the present.

Please provide this information as soon as possible but no later than 5:00 p.m. on August 3, 2023. In addition, we ask that you make Brady Olson, as well as the FBI employees described in the requests above, available to the Committee for transcribed interviews.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-6906. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jim Jordan  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Jerrold L. Nadler, Ranking Member