"Congressional Trolls": Democratic Leaders Pushed Refuted Russian Troll Claims

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The latest release of Twitter Files from Matt Taibbi shows that Democratic leaders like **Rep. Adam Schiff** *(D-CA) were aware that they were pushing a likely false story of "Russian bots" to discredit a report on FBI abuses.* **Sens. Dianne Feinstein** *(D-CA) and* **Richard Blumenthal** *(D-CT) are also mentioned by Twitter as part of what staff called "congressional trolls" who did not seem to care if the allegations were true and only wanted Twitter to say they were true. Schiff and Blumenthal have been two of most outspoken advocates for censorship on the social media, often using "conspiracy theories" by Republicans to justify limits on free speech.*

Some of the communications deal with a classified memo prepared by former **Rep. Devin Nunes** to the House Intelligence Committee on FBI abuses in the use of the FISA courts. That memo turned out to be well based, including the long-denied surveillance of Trump, his campaign, and campaign associates. It also highlighted how the Steele Dossier was discredited by U.S. intelligence officials despite being pushed by figures like Schiff.

We discussed earlier the files showing that Schiff was secretly pushing for censoring critics, including a columnist, while publicly denying that he supported any form of censorship.

Now the disclosures show that Schiff and others pushed Twitter to support their unsupported claims that "Russian bots" were pushing the Nunes report and other criticism. Twitter staff detail efforts to try to satisfy the Democratic members despite the lack of evidence supporting their claims. They referred to it as "feeding congressional trolls."

> 3.Twitter officials were aghast, finding no evidence of Russian influence:
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> "We are feeding congressional trolls."
> "Not any...significant activity connected to Russia."
> "Putting the cart before the horse assuming this is propaganda/bots."
> pic.twitter.com/r8O21QacME

Taibbi wrote that "Twitter warned politicians and media the[y] not only lacked evidence, but had evidence the accounts weren't Russian – and were roundly ignored."

At the time, Yoel Roth, the former head of Trust & Safety, wrote

> "I just reviewed the accounts that posted the first 50 tweets with #releasethememo and… none of them show any signs of affiliation to Russia. We investigated, found that engagement as overwhelmingly organic, and driven by [Very Important Tweeters] VITs."

Blumenthal did not appear to care if the claim was true or not. After being told that there was no evidence that the story was being propelled by Russian bots and trolls, Blumenthal responded with a letter declaring that "we find it reprehensible that Russian agents have so eagerly manipulated innocent Americans."

So, after being told that this was an unsupported conspiracy theory, Blumenthal continued to push the claim. One official wrote "Blumenthal isn't looking for real and nuanced solutions" but "just wants to get credit for pushing us further."

> https://t.co/eOqNK7yE15 the story, if you give a mouse a cookie, he'll want a glass of milk, which will lead to a wave of other exhausting requests, at the end of which he'll want a glass of milk. And one more cookie. pic.twitter.com/ySlFfzGt1y
>
> — Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi) [January 12, 2023](#)

Twitter officials compared Blumenthal and Schiff to the mouse in the children's story "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie." In other words, by trying to appease them, they demanded more confirmation of false claims.

Blumenthal has long demanded censorship to combat Republican "conspiracy theories."

As previously discussed, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey appeared at a key hearing in which he followed up his apology for censoring the Hunter Biden story by pledging more censorship.

Notably, Dorsey starts with the same argument made by free speech advocates:

> "Well, misleading information, as you are aware, is a large problem. It's hard to define it completely and cohesively." However, instead of then raising concerns over censoring views and comments on the basis for such an amorphous category, Democratic senators pressed for an expansion of the categories of censored material to prevent people from sharing any views that he considers "climate denialism"

Senator Blumenthal said that he was "concerned that both of your companies are, in fact, backsliding or retrenching, that you are failing to take action against dangerous disinformation." Accordingly, he demanded an answer to this question:

"Will you commit to the same kind of robust content modification playbook in this coming election, including fact checking, labeling, reducing the spread of misinformation, and other steps, even for politicians in the runoff elections ahead?"

While the media ran with the false claims of Schiff and Blumenthal during the Russian collusion investigation, there is little attention to these files and the fact that they were told that these these claims lacked support by Twitter.

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