

EXCLUSIVE: Transcripts of Lisa Page's Closed-Door Testimonies Provide New Revelations in Spycgate Scandal



[Jeff Carlson](#)

Transcripts of two closed-door testimonies by Lisa Page, the former assistant general counsel at the FBI, have provided new insights into the actions of the FBI, DOJ, and others—including CIA Director John Brennan—regarding their investigation into Donald Trump.

Included in the transcripts provided to us is information suggesting Brennan was aware of the so-called Steele dossier in early August 2016, and that he included information regarding the dossier in a briefing given to then-Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.).

Other key points in Page's testimony before Congress:

- The FBI appears to have considered investigating President Trump for obstruction of justice both before and after FBI Director James Comey was fired.

- Page says the DOJ refused to pursue “gross-negligence” charges against Hillary Clinton over her use of a private email server to send classified information.
- FBI agent Michael Gaeta, head of the Eurasian Crime Squad, who received the dossier from former MI6 spy Steele in July 2016 is referred to in the transcript as Steele’s handler.
- The FBI maintained a previously unknown verification file for the Steele dossier. Congressional investigators did not previously know of its existence.
- John Carlin, the head of the DOJ’s National Security Division, was kept abreast of the FBI’s investigative activities through contact with then-Deputy FBI Director McCabe.
- Page worked directly for DOJ official Bruce Ohr for at least five years and had met his wife, Nellie, once.
- The role of FBI Agent Jonathan Moffa and DOJ official George Toscas may have been greater than initially assumed.

The interviews with Page were conducted by Congressional lawmakers on July 13 and 16, 2018, in an unclassified setting, with the appropriate agency counsel present to ensure that classified information did not enter into the unclassified setting.

Page testified that she joined the team of special counsel Robert Mueller around May 18, 2017—and that FBI Agent Peter Strzok was considered for inclusion shortly thereafter. Page’s role was to “bridge the gap and transition between what we as a team knew and the evidence that we had gathered to date on the collusion investigation and sort of imparting that knowledge to the new special counsel team,” she said.

Page, who acknowledged her personal relationship with Strzok at several points during the interview, noted that initially, Strzok was not “brought over as the senior executive to run the investigation. Another individual was, and that was not successful. It was not a good match with Mr. Mueller. He did not really have the sufficient counterintelligence background to be effective.” That individual would later be identified as John Brown.

Page agreed to work for a 45-day trial period, but at the end of that time, she left to spend more time with her children, by her own account. Page left of her own volition and before Inspector General Michael Horowitz notified Mueller (and then-Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe) of the texts between Page and Strzok.

Page noted that she only traveled abroad once while she worked for McCabe, in December 2016, on official business in London. Strzok traveled with her, as did three other unnamed individuals. One individual that Page specified as not being part of the trip was Bill Priestap, the FBI’s head of counterintelligence. Page was prohibited by FBI counsel for detailing the purpose of her visit.

Prior to her work for Deputy FBI Director McCabe, Page worked within the DOJ—where Bruce Ohr was her direct supervisor for five to six years. Page also met Nellie Ohr, Bruce Ohr’s wife, at a summer barbeque that Ohr held for the office in 2011.

One particularly interesting bit of information is that Page read the memos written by then-FBI Director James Comey almost in real time. As she stated in testimony, “I reviewed most of them within a day or on the same day that they were created.”

According to Page, others who were privy to Comey's memos included four additional FBI officials, "Jim Rybicki, Mr. McCabe, Mr. Ghattas, maybe Mr. Bowdich."

Strzok did not have access to Comey's memos. McCabe also kept memos which Page reviewed, including "one or two" that pertained to meetings with President Donald Trump. During questioning, it became apparent that the McCabe memos were "relevant to the matters that the special counsel is investigating."

Page Denies Bias, But Says FBI Focussed More on Trump Than Clinton

Page steadfastly maintained there was no bias present in either the Clinton-email investigation or the Trump-Russia investigation on the part of anyone within the FBI or the DOJ and went to some lengths to illustrate that, in general, FBI personnel don't like most of the people they tend to investigate.

At the same time, Page repeatedly and openly admitted to placing a greater emphasis and weight on the Trump-Russia investigation than the Clinton-email investigation:

"If you were weighing resources with respect to which poses a graver threat to national security, which is more, frankly, important, there is no doubt—at least in mine or anybody else's mind that I know—that the Russia investigation posed an incredible threat to national security, and whether we got into the Weiner laptop simply did not."

Page returned to this topic several times:

"The notion that there might be more emails that have not previously been seen that existed on Hillary Clinton's email server just simply don't even enter into the realm of the same room of seriousness. The Clinton investigation involved activities that had taken place 3 years prior. It's an entirely historical investigation."

"In the assessment of the Counterintelligence Division, they still don't even come close to the threat posed if Russia had co-opted

a member of a political campaign.”

Although Page admitted to a personal dislike for Trump, she also admitted to a less-than-favorable view of Hillary Clinton, noting that while she did not like then-candidate Trump, she “wasn’t particularly fond or favorable toward Secretary Clinton. Page summed her position up thusly: “I mean, given a Trump-Clinton race, yes, I was supporting Clinton, but I was not a particularly big fan of hers.”

The role of FBI agent Jonathan Moffa, currently a deputy assistant director at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, may have been greater than previously understood. Page noted that most of the FBI personnel involved in the Clinton and Trump-Russia investigations were separate from each other—they worked on one investigation or the other.

Strzok and Moffa, both from the FBI’s Counterintelligence Division, worked on both investigations, as Page noted:

“Really it’s the people that met with Jim Comey. Those are the only people that were really the same with respect to both teams. So it’s the same general counsel, the same deputy general counsel, me, Mr. McCabe, Dave Bowdich. The EAD for National Security Branch changed, but that was just because of regular personnel turnover.

“Bill Priestap was the same. Pete was the same. Jon Moffa was the same. But other than that, all of the rest of the personnel were, to the best of my knowledge—there could have been one or two—but all of the rest of the personnel on the Clinton team and the Russia team were different.”

DOJ Influence

Page also repeatedly noted a tension between the FBI and DOJ, noting that the DOJ was far more cautious in their approach to matters and was ultimately responsible for the decision not to prosecute in the Clinton Case.

Another aspect that developed in the dynamic between the DOJ and the FBI was pressure from the department to place additional people into the FBI's investigation. Page noted that "as soon as the planning started to begin to interview some of the more high-profile witness, not just Mrs. Clinton but also Huma Abedin, Cheryl Mills, Jake Sullivan, and her sort of core team, the Department wanted to change the sort of structure and the number of people who were involved."

In particular, David Laufman, a Deputy Assistant Attorney General and head of counterintelligence for the DOJ's National Security Division at the time, pushed extensively to be present for the higher profile interviews. As Page noted, this quickly spiralled into a problem for the FBI:

"Once we started talking about including David, then the U.S. Attorney's Office also wanted to participate in the interviews, although they had participated in virtually none by that point. And so then the U.S. Attorney's Office was pushing to have the AUSAs [Assistant U.S. Attorney], who were participating in the Clinton investigation, also participate."

"And so now, all of a sudden, we were going from our standard two and two to this burgeoning number of people."

Apparently, Laufman felt so strongly that he went to his boss, George Toscas, the Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the National Security Division, who then approached Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe directly.

The DOJ's ongoing influence was felt in other ways as well. Cheryl Mills and Heather Samuelson, both fact witnesses, were allowed to attend Clinton's interview as her attorneys. As Page admitted, "I would agree with you that it is not typically appropriate or operationally necessary to have fact witnesses attend the interview."

The decision to allow attendance of fact witnesses during Clinton's interview came from the DOJ, although Page said she was not certain who had made the decision. She noted that the FBI protested the move but were overridden, so the decision must have come from a senior level within the DOJ.

Disagreements Between the FBI and DOJ

As Page noted during her testimony, “there were lots and lots and lots of disagreements between the FBI and the Department.” One issue of ongoing contention was Clinton’s actual email server:

“There was a great deal of discussion between the FBI and the Department with respect to whether to proceed, obtain the server which housed the bulk of Secretary Clinton’s emails, pursuant to consent or pursuant to a subpoena or other compulsory process.”

Additionally, access to the laptops of Clinton’s aides and personal lawyers was an area of particular contention:

“There were, I think, months of disagreement with respect to obtaining the Mills and Samuelson laptops. So Heather Mills and —Cheryl Mills and Heather Samuelson were both lawyers who engaged in the sorting. Once it had been identified that Secretary Clinton had these emails—I’m guessing it’s pursuant to the FOIA request, but I don’t really know—she—well, our understanding is that she asked her two lawyers to take the bulk of the 60,000 emails and to sort out those which were work-related from those which were personal and to produce the work-related ones to the State Department.

“They did so. That 30,000 is sort of the bulk of the emails that we relied on in order to do the investigative technique, although we found other emails a jillion other places. We, the FBI, felt very strongly that we had to acquire and attempt to review the

content of the Mills and Samuelson laptops because, to the extent the other 30,000 existed anywhere, that is the best place that they may have existed.”

“And notwithstanding the fact that they had been deleted, you know, we wanted at least to take a shot at using, you know, forensic recovery tools in order to try to ensure that, in fact, the sorting that occurred between—or by Mills and Samuelson was done correctly.”

According to Page, the ongoing dispute with the DOJ ran from “February/March-ish of 2016” to June of 2016. Page also noted one other critical factor in the investigation: “the FBI cannot execute a search warrant without approval from the Justice Department.”

Notably, Page, an experienced lawyer, thought the legal case could be made that the Mills and Samuelson laptops should be made available for forensic examination. As she noted, the frustration within the FBI came, in part, from the DOJ’s “unwillingness to explain their reasoning.”

Page noted that this issue regarding the laptops rose to “the head of the OEO, the Office of Enforcement Operations, which is the unit at the Justice Department who would have to approve a warrant on a lawyer—because, of course, these were all lawyer laptops. It rose to that individual, it rose to George Toscas, over the course of this 3 months or so.”

Toscas will also come up in the section below relating to his boss, John Carlin.

Equally important, the issue, at least once, rose even higher:

“I think that even the Director [Comey] may have had a conversation with Sally Yates, the DAG [Deputy Attorney General], about it.”

Page was also critical of the State Department’s handling of the affair, noting, “rather than the State Department itself conducting that analysis of whether or not there was—or whether these emails were work-related or not, deferred to Secretary Clinton to do that.”

Emails to a Third Party

During one exchange, one of the Representatives questioning her noted, “we have information from the inspector general of the intelligence community ... that there were anomalies that would suggest that there was copies of every email going to a third party ... Is this news to you today?”

Page admitted it was and noted it was “completely baffling to me.”

She was then asked the obvious question: “why would the investigative team not have had multiple interviews with Mr. Rucker, who brought it to the FBI’s attention originally?”

Page responded by saying the following:

“My understanding is that the IC IG [Intelligence Community Inspector General] did refer the existence of the server to the FBI, but that was because of the existence of classified information on that server, not because of any anomalous activity, not because of potential intrusion activity. Because it’s not my understanding that the IC IG conducted any sort of forensic analysis like that.”

The questioning continued:

“So what you’re telling me, it would surprise you to know today that, if there were anomalies, that the inspector general’s forensic team found those before it was referred to the FBI?”

Page responded:

“To the extent that a foreign government or even a criminal outlet had had access to Secretary Clinton’s private email server, that would have been something we cared very much about. And it’s my understanding that there was no evidence that would have supported that kind of conclusion.”

Page's Commentary on the DOJ

Page, while never actually accusing the DOJ of direct wrongdoing, also appeared to be no fan of the department. Some commentary from her testimony:

"We all felt that we [the FBI] were more credible than the Justice Department to close this investigation out."

"We, the whole team, really, felt that the Justice Department, being led by Democrats, would be to essentially absolve the Democratic candidate."

"She is so loathed, she is a very polarizing figure, Secretary Clinton, and so we all knew it was 100 percent consistent and universal that she was—there was not a prosecutable case. And we, the FBI, thought that that message was more credible coming from the FBI, who is independent and is not a political sort of body, in the same way that the Justice Department is being headed by political appointees who have closer relationships with the White House."

Page also discussed the DOJ's reaction to Comey's decision to hold his solitary press conference:

"I don't honestly have the sense that the Attorney General was ultimately disappointed, because it really did let the Justice Department off the hook. Everybody talks about this as if this was the FBI investigation, and the truth of the matter is there was not a single step, other than the July 5th statement, there was not a single investigative step that we did not do in consultation with or at the direction of the Justice Department."

In relation to then-Attorney General Loretta Lynch, Page had a notable observation:

“I am not sure she ever formally recused herself. She sort of, I think, did a half step, which I think she’s been criticized for, which was that she didn’t fully sort of step away from the investigation following the tarmac incident. She said that she would defer to the sort of judgment of the career prosecutor. So I don’t—I wouldn’t—we can call that a recusal if that’s how you want to frame it, but I don’t know that that legally would be considered one.”

Gross Negligence and Intent

Of particular note throughout the interview was the discussion of intent. Page noted that what they were looking for was “an intent to mishandle classified information.” She continued, “I cannot point to anything with respect to what the team uncovered that spoke to her having an intent to mishandle classified information.”

Page spent a fair amount of time describing the legal aspects of the term “gross negligence” and why that specific language was removed from Comey’s July 5, 2016, exoneration memo of Clinton:

“We neither had sufficient evidence to charge gross negligence, nor had it ever been done, because the Department viewed it as constitutionally vague.”

The reference to the Justice Department would be repeated multiple times with Page noting, “we had multiple conversations with the Justice Department about bringing a gross negligence charge. And that’s, as I said, the advice that we got from the Department was that they did not think—that it was constitutionally vague and not sustainable.”

This was the rationale as to why “every single person on the team, whether FBI or DOJ, knew far earlier than July that we were not going to be able to make out sufficient evidence to charge a crime.”

As to whether a charge could be brought under the “gross negligence” statute, Page noted “that’s a determination made by

the Department [DOJ].” Notably, this determination was made before Clinton or anyone else had been interviewed by the FBI.

One Representative pointed out that the subject might be able to provide the missing element of intent during a yet-to-be had interview, but Page made clear the full impact of the DOJ’s position:

“Let’s assume things are going swimmingly and, in fact, all 17 of those witnesses admit, ‘We did it, it was on purpose, we totally wanted to mishandle classified information,’ gross negligence would still have been off the table because of the Department’s assessment that it was vague. We would have other crimes to now charge, but gross negligence would not have been among them.”

Page admitted that it was not entirely clear what the DOJ decision was based on, noting, “I presume they looked at case law in which it had been applied. I really don’t know...I don’t have personal knowledge about what the Department did in order to come to that conclusion.”

When pressed, Page attempted to clarify the FBI’s position as investigators, saying that “at the end of the day, this is the Department’s determination. It is up to the Department to determine whether we have sufficient evidence to charge a case.” Later she was a bit more direct:

“The Justice Department brings charges, and it was the Justice Department’s assessment that they did not have—whether they had—I don’t know whether they had evidence or not of gross negligence but that gross negligence was not available as a

statute to bring because it's—of its constitutional vagueness and its untestedness in court.”

John Carlin's Role

John Carlin was an assistant attorney general and head of the DOJ's National Security Division (NSD). He had previously served as chief of staff to then-FBI Director Robert Mueller.

[Carlin](#) announced his resignation the day after he filed the Government's proposed [2016 Section 702 certifications](#). This filing would be subject to intense criticism from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) following disclosures made by NSA Director Mike Rogers. Significant changes to the handling of raw FISA data would result.

Carlin was replaced with Mary McCord—who would later accompany Acting AG Sally Yates to see White House Counsel Don McGahn regarding Trump's National Security Adviser General Michael Flynn.

Page was asked at several points regarding influence from political appointees. At one point in the discussion, she singled out Carlin—and what she had to say proved interesting:

"I do know that at least John Carlin, for example, who is a political appointee was kept abreast of the sort of investigative activity that was going on. And the only reason I know this is because when there was conflicts between us and DOJ, John might call over to—John Carlin might call over to Andy McCabe, and sort of make his team's pitch, and then Andy would, you know, sort of the back and forth would go on. So it is clear that John had, was getting some sort of briefing, but he was not, it was, it never occurred by the FBI, which is, in my view, atypical."

In response to a question asking who was McCabe's direct counterpart at the DOJ on the investigation, Page responded, "it would have been John. It was either John Carlin or George Toscas who would have, who would have reached out to Mr. McCabe."

The Congressional staffer who was doing this particular line of questioning appeared to attempt to mitigate the information just revealed by Page:

"Numerous witnesses have confirmed to us that George Toscas, a career prosecutor, was in charge of the day-to-day operation of DOJ on this investigation. And that Carlin and other political folks above him had briefings certainly, so they had knowledge but didn't have input in the investigation."

"Do you have any personal knowledge of John Carlin, Loretta Lynch, Sally Yates, or other political appointees at the DOJ issuing orders on how to conduct the Midyear investigation?" Page was asked.

Page answered that she had "no personal knowledge of that." Despite the attempts to shift the conversation, these admissions are notable.

Carlin was a very senior official within the DOJ. He was also Toscas's boss. It was Toscas who was contacted by New York prosecutors (possibly Preet Bharara) involved in the Anthony Weiner investigation regarding the Clinton emails found on Weiner's computer. In response, Toscas contacted McCabe, his counterpart at the FBI, ultimately forcing McCabe to inform Comey of the existence of Clinton emails on Weiner's laptop.

Brennan's Role

Page staunchly maintained that any briefings given to the White House were always about the "Russian active measures effort" and were not in relation to "Crossfire Hurricane," the FBI's name for their counterintelligence investigation into the Trump-Russia allegations.

Brennan has admitted during congressional testimony that his intelligence helped [establish](#) the FBI counterintelligence investigation:

"I was aware of intelligence and information about contacts between Russian officials and U.S. persons that raised concerns in my mind about whether or not those individuals were cooperating with the Russians, either in a witting or unwitting fashion, and it served as the basis for the FBI investigation to determine whether such collusion [or] cooperation occurred."

This admission is important, particularly since Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) had previously disclosed that [no official intelligence](#) was used to open the FBI's investigation.

Brennan's role was highlighted again during testimony, as one Representative questioning Page questioned her in relation to an Aug. 25, 2016, text message: "What are you doing after the CH brief?" CH almost certainly referred to "Crossfire Hurricane."

Page was asked specifically about an event that occurred on the same day:

“It’s the same day that Director Brennan is briefing Harry Reid, is why I ask. And so what you’re saying is you were unaware that Director Brennan was briefing Harry Reid that same day?”

Page said she was unaware of Brennan’s briefing to Reid. She was then asked the following:

“You give a brief on August the 25th. Director Brennan is giving a brief. It’s not a Gang of Eight brief. It is a one-on-one, from what we can tell, a one-on-one briefing with Harry Reid at that point. And it becomes apparent, based on your text messages and based on Director Comey’s emails, that you all are aware that that conversation took place. Were you aware that Director Brennan had a briefing with Harry Reid and that you expected a letter from Harry Reid?”

Page noted that she remembered the letter sent by Reid, but seemed confused as to Brennan’s involvement and possible knowledge of the Steele dossier. Worth noting is that while some within the FBI likely had parts of the dossier in July, the Counterintelligence investigative team did not receive it until mid-September during a trip to Rome where they met personally with Steele.

The Representative, who was clearly aware of the disparity in timing, focused on precisely how Brennan might have been aware of the dossier in August:

Rep.: So what you’re saying is, is that you had no knowledge of these potential unverified memos prior to the middle part of September in your investigation?

Page: That is correct, sir.

Rep.: Okay. So on August 30th, you and Peter are going back and forth, and you go, "Here we go." If you'll look at 9:44:50 on August the 30th, you go, "Here we go." And it's referencing "Harry Reid Cites Evidence of Russian Tampering in the U.S. Vote and Seeks FBI." Now, what happens is, and what I guess gives me a little bit of concern is, if you drop down, that if you drop down to the same day, August 30th, 9:45, it says: "The D"—which I assume means Director—"said at the a.m. brief that Reid had called him and told him that he would be sending the letter."

Page: Okay.

Rep.: So you get a brief that says, well, we got the letter, but it's almost like it's a coordinated effort between Harry Reid and the FBI Director, because obviously, he's briefing you.

After a bit of back and forth, Page responded, "I don't know what Harry Reid was told or why or what the purpose of Brennan [was.]"

The Representative pressed on:

"Why would Director Brennan be aware of things that the FBI was not aware of at this particular point when it actually would potentially involve, according to Peter Strzok's word on January 10th of 2017, an unverified salacious set of memos?"

And then the big reveal:

Rep.: We have documents that would suggest that in that briefing the dossier was mentioned to Harry Reid and then obviously we're going to have to have conversations. Does that

surprise you that Director Brennan would be aware [of the dossier]?

Page: Yes, sir. Because with all due honesty, if Director Brennan —so we got that information from our source, right? The FBI got this information from our source. If the CIA had another source of that information, I am neither aware of that nor did the CIA provide it to us if they did, because the first time we —

Rep.: We do know there are multiple sources.

Page: I do know that. I do know that the information ultimately found its way lots of different places, certainly in October of 2016. But if the CIA as early as August, in fact, had those same reports, I am not aware of—I'm not aware of that and nor do I believe they provided them to us, and that would be unusual.

Rep.: Were you aware that Christopher Steele had conversations or multiple conversations with Fusion GPS and others outside of just working special intel for you?

Page: As of August of 2016, I don't know who Christopher Steele is. I don't know that he's an FBI source. I don't know what he does. I have never heard of him in all of my life. So let me just sort of be clear. When the FBI first receives the reports that are known as the dossier from an FBI agent who is Christopher Steele's handler in September of 2016 at that time, we do not know who—we don't know why these reports have been generated. We don't know for what purpose.

A bit later in the discussion, the representative asked another question:

“So you don’t know whether it’s a coordinated effort to get you those documents or not at that point in September?”

Page responds, “Coordinated by whom, sir?”

Rep.: Anybody, other than a confidential human source saying, “Listen, I’ve got reason to be concerned and bring it to you.” It could be coordinated by the CIA. It could have been coordinated by Fusion GPS. You don’t know.

Page: At the time that we received the documentation, no. What we have is the preexisting relationship with the source and the reliability of his prior reporting.

FISA Briefings & White House Knowledge

At several points, Page noted a frustration on the part of the FBI in relation to the speed with which the DOJ was moving in the FISA spy warrant application process.

When questioned about the need to move swiftly, Page noted, “there was an operational reason that we were pushing to get the FISA up, which I am not at liberty to discuss.” Upon further questioning Page tried to provide slightly more clarity, “we had an operational reason that we wanted to get this thing up quickly with respect to the subject himself.”

According to Page’s testimony, she first learned of plans to obtain a FISA warrant on Trump campaign adviser Carter Page approximately a month before the FISA was granted on Oct. 21, 2016.

Page disclosed that Deputy Assistant Attorney General Stu Evans was the person within the DOJ who was in charge of the entire FISA process, but notably, the FBI chose not to tell Evans that they had opened a counterintelligence investigation:

“We were so concerned about the fact that we were opening this investigation and we were so concerned about leaks that we were literally individually making decisions about who to tell and who not to tell, because we were trying to keep it so closely held.”

According to Page, the only DOJ official they told was George Toscas, the Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the National Security Division. Without forewarning to the FBI, Toscas

informed Evans in August 2016—possibly earlier—of the FBI’s newly opened investigation.

The text in question was from Aug. 10, 2016, and was paraphrased by one of the congressional representatives:

“I remember what it was, Toscas already told Stu Evans everything. Sally called to set up a meeting.”

“Sally” is affirmed in the conversation as Deputy AG Sally Yates.

Page was emphatic that this discussion did not have anything to do with the actual FISA but instead reflected the FBI’s concern that increasing numbers of people were learning of their investigation.

Notably, Toscas reported to John Carlin, the head of the NSD, whose actions before the FISA Court in relation to his presentation of the Government’s proposed [2016 Section 702 certifications](#), strongly suggest he was also aware of the FBI’s investigation. Carlin appears to have been aware of the FBI’s later FISA preparations as well.

The congressional representative then asked the following question:

“What you’re saying is when the Director briefed the White House 2 days prior to that, on August the 8th, or prepared for it, actually briefed him on the 10th, that it had nothing to do with any campaign. Even though George Toscas and Stu Evans knew about it.”

Normally, when a member of the FBI uses the word “Director” they would be referring to the FBI Director. In this case, while not made absolutely clear in the transcript, it appears “Director” refers to CIA Director John Brennan, who had been discussed in the preceding comments relating to Brennan’s briefing of Reid.

From Brennan’s [congressional testimony](#), we know that he had briefed the White House at some point in early August 2016, prior to Aug. 11:

“In consultation with the White House, I personally briefed the full details of our understanding of Russian attempts to interfere in election to congressional leadership, specifically Senators Harry Reid, Mitch McConnell, Dianne Feinstein and Richard Burr; and to Representatives Paul Ryan, Nancy Pelosi, Devon Nunes and Adam Schiff between 11, August and 6, September.”

Page responded to the question: “Sir, I would be shocked. I would truly be stunned to discover that the Director had briefed the President on the substance of our investigation or even the existence of our investigation. I would be—I can’t say it didn’t happen, I wasn’t there, but I would be stunned to discover that.”

Steele's FBI Handler

Page had earlier referenced Steele's handler:

"When the FBI first receives the reports that are known as the dossier from an FBI agent who is Christopher Steele's handler in September of 2016 at that time, we do not know who—we don't know why these reports have been generated."

Steele's handler is almost certainly [Michael Gaeta](#), head of the FBI's Eurasian Crime Squad. Gaeta, an FBI agent and also [assistant legal attaché](#) at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, has known the former MI6 spy since at least 2010, when Steele provided assistance in the FBI's investigation into the FIFA corruption scandal over concern that Russia might have been engaging in bribery to host the 2018 World Cup.

On July 5, 2016, Gaeta traveled to London and met with Steele at the offices of Steele's firm, Orbis. For this visit, the FBI sought permission from the office of Victoria Nuland, the assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs. Nuland, who had been the recipient of many of Steele's reports, [gave permission](#) for the more formal meeting.

Nuland provided this version of events during a Feb. 4, 2018, [appearance](#) on CBS News' Face the Nation:

"In the middle of July, when he [Steele] was doing this other work and became concerned, he passed two to four pages of short points of what he was finding and our immediate reaction to that was, this is not in our purview. This needs to go to the FBI if there is any concern here that one candidate or the election as a

whole might be influenced by the Russian Federation. That's something for the FBI to investigate."

In September 2016, Steele would travel back to Rome to meet with the FBI Eurasian squad once again. It was at this meeting that Steele gave a copy of his dossier—what there was of it at that time—to the FBI counterintelligence team investigators.

One individual who had previous involvement with the Eurasian Crime Squad was former FBI Deputy Director [McCabe](#):

"McCabe began his career as a special agent with the FBI in 1996," the FBI states on its website. "He first reported to the New York division, where he investigated a variety of organized crime matters. In 2003, he became the supervisory special agent of the Eurasian Organized Crime Task Force."

McCabe remained with the Eurasian squad until 2006, when he was moved to FBI headquarters in Washington.

The question that has yet to be answered was who, exactly, did Gaeta give the dossier to and when. Was it transmitted to FBI leadership? If so, why did the counterintelligence team have to travel to Rome in September to get their first copy from Steele.

And finally, potentially the biggest question: Did Brennan receive a copy of the dossier via Gaeta—or whomever he transmitted a copy to—in the summer of 2016 following Gaeta's return?

The FBI's Verification File & the Dragon FISA

Page testified that as soon as they received the Steele dossier in September, they “set about trying to prove or disprove every single factual statement in the dossier.” Page noted that “to the best of my knowledge, we were never able to disprove any statement in it.”

This seems somewhat odd given that Comey told congressional investigators the Steele dossier still wasn't verified as of May 2017. Additionally, her assertion does not appear to address the generally debunked claim that Cohen was in Prague.

In response to Page's comments, clarification was requested:

Rep.: Ms. Page, are you talking about the Woods file?

Page: I'm not talking about the Woods file. I'm talking about a separate effort that was undertaken in order to try to verify for investigative purposes, not for purposes of the FISA, but a separate effort undertaken to try to validate the allegations contained within the Steele reporting.

It quickly became apparent that this document has not been seen by congressional investigators. One Representative, who noted he has seen the Woods file, was clearly unaware of this file's existence.

This discussion quickly led into another area—an Oct. 18, 2016, email from Strzok containing the subject line “Re: Dragon FISA.”

Page quickly noted that she could not discuss the matter in an unclassified setting—but would be able to discuss the matter with congressional investigators in a classified setting.

The Dragon FISA was referenced in an [article](#) by John Solomon in The Hill:

“In one email exchange with the subject line “Crossfire FISA,” Strzok and Lisa Page discussed talking points to get then-FBI Deputy Director [Andrew McCabe](#) to persuade a high-ranking DOJ official to sign off on the warrant.

“Crossfire Hurricane” was one of the code names for four separate investigations the FBI conducted related to Russia matters in the 2016 election.

“At a minimum, that keeps the hurry the F up pressure on him,” Strzok emailed Page on Oct. 14, 2016, less than four weeks before Election Day.

Four days later the same team was emailing about rushing to get approval for another FISA warrant for another Russia-related investigation code-named “Dragon.””

At this point, the potential subject of the Dragon FISA remains unknown.

Page's Russia Bias

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Page expressed strong feelings regarding Russia, noting, "I do always hate the Russians," and she singled out the nation as a national security threat far exceeding that of China or North Korea:

"Russia poses the greatest threat certainly to Western ideals of any of our foreign adversaries. And we have vast foreign adversaries. But even the threats that are posed by China or by Iran or North Korea or others doesn't speak to sort of the core of Western democracy, right?"

"It is my opinion that with respect to Western ideals and who it is and what it is we stand for as Americans, Russia poses the most dangerous threat to that way of life."

Page appeared to be singularly focused on Russia making only one reference to China throughout the entire interview.

Comey's Draft Memo

The end result of the wording in Comey's statement was widely publicized but some of the reporting details were incorrect. The term "gross negligence" was not exchanged for "extremely careless." It was simply removed from Comey's initial draft. Page explained, "extremely careless had already appeared in that draft, and we moved that paragraph up earlier in the draft."

However, a few questionable elements surrounding Comey's draft were highlighted during questioning. On May 2, 2016, Comey drafted his exoneration letter. On May 3, after learning that Trump would be the GOP nominee, Strzok sent a text noting, "'Now the pressure really starts to finish the MYE.'" MYE being a reference to the Mid-Year Exam—the FBI's case name for the Clinton email investigation. The "gross negligence" language within Comey's memo was deleted by May 6.

Page claimed this was purely bad timing and bad optics and had nothing to do with Trump's securing of the GOP nomination. By way of reassurance, she noted that the decision to omit the "gross negligence" language was the decision of another lawyer—ranked at the level of GS-15.

One Representative noted the discrepancy immediately:

Rep.: Did any of the other folks that you're referencing in connection with making the change have more prosecutorial experience than Jim Comey?

Page: No.

Rep.: As someone that knows Jim Comey, is he a person that chooses his words carefully?

Page: He is, yeah. But I —

Rep.: Would he throw around a term like “gross negligence” not really meaning gross negligence?

Page did not have a ready answer to this line of questioning, other than to reiterate that the DOJ had made clear the charge was not supportable. Never clarified, was why did Comey choose to include the phrase in the first place. Given the tight sequence of events, the DOJ had surely made the determination not to pursue gross negligence charges prior to Comey’s decision to use the phrase anyway.

The Insurance Policy

Another issue that was brought up several times was the famous Strzok text regarding the “Insurance Policy”:

“I want to believe the path you threw out in Andy’s office—that there is no way he gets elected—but I’m afraid we can’t take that risk. It’s like an insurance policy in the unlikely event you die before you’re 40.”

Page confirmed that Andy referred to Deputy FBI Director McCabe. Page was reminded that the text was sent just 15 days after the FBI opened its counterintelligence investigation on July 31, 2016. Page attempted to provide an explanation, but it came across as less than convincing:

“What this text reflects is our sort of continuing check-in almost with respect to how quickly to operate, what types of tools to use, trying to be as quiet as possible about it because we knew so little about what—whether this was true or not true or what was going to come, because this is, as you said, so nascent in the investigation, and then ultimately trying to balance that against my view, in this case, which was we don’t need to go at a total breakneck speed because so long as he doesn’t become President, there isn’t the same threat to national security, right.”

Perhaps realizing she’d been less than perfectly clear, Page attempted to clarify her position, noting, “this reflects: Let’s be reasonable, let’s not, you know, throw the kitchen sink at this because he’s probably not going to be elected, and so then we

don't have quite as horrific a national security threat than if we do if he gets elected."

In fairness to Page, at a later point in the interview, she did manage to provide a somewhat more coherent explanation:

"He's making an analogy here so my suggestion is, let's not, you know, throw the baby out with the bath water, let's sort of be a little bit more cautious with respect to our investigative steps because if he's not President, this plays a less of a threat to our national security."

"And he is saying, no, we have to, you know, do what we have to do in order to get to the bottom of this because it is like an insurance policy. There is no actual insurance policy. He is making an analogy."

Kortan's Role in Page's Leaks to the Media

Page said in her testimony that she “was authorized by Deputy Director McCabe and by Mike Kortan to engage with the reporter [Devlin Barrett] on this topic.” This refers to a [leak](#) by Page to Barrett, who worked at the Wall Street Journal, regarding the FBI's investigation into the Clinton Foundation.

Interestingly, Page highlighted the role of Kortan as assistant director of Public Affairs Office at the FBI. Kortan is mentioned nowhere in the IG's [report](#) specific to McCabe, although he is mentioned in the [IG's June report](#). Kortan, who has since retired, was in place during a lengthy sequence of unauthorized disclosures highlighted by the IG's report—and as Page testifies, had full knowledge of her leaks on behalf of McCabe:

“I agree with you that it is curious that there is no reference in the IG report at all to Mr. Kortan, particularly in light of what I reported, which is that both interactions with the reporter were done with Mr. Kortan, in coordination with Mr. Kortan and with Mr. Kortan at my side. So I cannot explain why there is no—there is no reference to Mr. Kortan in any testimony, if he did give any, in the IG report.”

Kortan's involvement in Page's authorized leaks to Barrett had not been previously known.

A Possible Obstruction Case

Still another issue mentioned with some frequency were two potentially related texts:

“And we need to open the case we’ve been waiting on now while Andy is acting.”

“We need to lock in,” redacted, “in a formal, chargeable, way.”

Again, Page confirms that Andy is indeed a reference to McCabe. Notably, that text was sent the day after Comey had been fired by Trump. Unfortunately, a certain level of clarity remains lacking as FBI counsel was limited to noting that “the decision to open the case was not about who was occupying the Director’s chair.” She continued in a somewhat confusingly with, “if I was able to explain in more depth why the Director firing precipitated this text, I would.”

One Representative kept pursuing the question from multiple angles, asking, “Was that a fear that someone other than McCabe would eventually be put into that slot?” Page again consulted with counsel and noted she could not answer that question.

The Representative made the logical observation, “Well, that leads at least some of us to conclude that it may have been an obstruction of justice case.” Page responded, “that’s a reasonable inference, sir, but I cannot, sort of, confirm that that’s what we are referring to.” The dialogue continued:

Rep.: So the firing of Jim Comey was the precipitating event as opposed to the occupant of the Director's office?

Page: Yes, that's correct.

Rep.: Well, other than obstruction, what could it have been?

Page: I can't answer that, sir. I'm sorry.

Rep.: Is there anything other than obstruction that it could have been?

Page: I can't answer.

Page maintained that the second text was a separate matter from the first—but time may have been a factor as it occurred in the days preceding Mueller's appointment as special counsel. Page also claimed not to know exactly what it pertained to:

"My suspicion is, we have either been interviewing some witness or have been getting kind of closer to some target, either we've already had interviews or we haven't."

"What this is suggesting is, like, we need to start thinking about locking in whomever in a way that might be able to support charges...my suspicion is that we have somebody who we think is lying... to the extent we want to be able to charge them for lying, we need to lock them in in a formal way, in a way in which we will be able to support those charges."

The issue of obstruction came up several times, including a notable exchange that took place during the second day of testimony:

Rep.: Were there discussions about opening an obstruction of justice case or any other case against Donald Trump prior to the firing of Jim Comey on May 9th of 2017, as reflected in the Comey memos?

FBI legal counsel: Congressman, to the extent that goes into the equities of the ongoing investigation that the special counsel is now conducting, I will instruct the witness not to answer.

Normally this line of questioning ends with inferences having to be made, but in this case what appears to be an honest error on the part of Page hinted firmly at the true answer:

Rep.: I don't want any of the details. I just want to know whether there was a discussion about the possibility of opening that prior to the firing of the Director.

Page: Obstruction of justice was not a topic of conversation during the timeframe you have described.

Rep.: Okay. Then —

Page: I think. One second, sir.

[Discussion off the record.]

Page: Sir, I need to — I need to take back my prior statement.

Rep.: Which one?

Page: Whatever the last thing I just said was. Sorry. That there were no discussions of obstruction, yeah. That is — I need to take that statement back.

Rep.: So there were?

Page: Well, I think that I can't answer this question without getting into matters which are substantively before the special counsel at this time.

Rep.: Well, I think you've just answered it by not answering it. Was Andy McCabe privy to those same conversations?

Page: I can't answer this substantively, sir. I'm sorry.

Rep.: Well, were these related to some charges, whether obstruction or other charges, potentially against Donald Trump?

Page: I can't—I can't answer that question, sir, without getting into the substance of matters that are now before the special counsel.

Rep.: Again, I think you're answering it by not answering it.

At a later point in testimony, this issue was potentially further clarified:

Rep.: Comey has admitted that he told the President, I think, that he wasn't under investigation during that timeframe.

Page: That is not inconsistent, sir...Somebody could not be under investigation, but there still could be discussions about potential criminal activity, and that is totally consistent with FBI policies and would not be unusual with respect to any investigation.

This provides a perfect explanation as to why Comey refused to tell the press that President Trump was not under investigation—and the nature of the text messages.

The FBI had not placed Trump under any formal investigation—but they were keeping their ability to do so open, and interim FBI Director McCabe may have been planning to initialize a formal investigation before a permanent director could be appointed.

A question worth asking: What happens if an interim FBI Director opens a formal investigation into a sitting president during a highly politically charged time? Is it then difficult, perhaps impossible, to appoint someone other than McCabe as a new FBI Director, especially given Comey's recent firing?

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