

Republican Senate Report on Biden's Son Alleges Conflict of Interest



Hunter Biden, son of former US Vice President Joe Biden.

WASHINGTON - Two Republican-led Senate committees issued a politically charged report Wednesday alleging that the work Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's son did in Ukraine constituted a conflict of interest for the Obama administration at a time when Biden was engaged in Ukraine policy as vice president.

But the report said it was ultimately "unclear" what impact Hunter Biden's position on the board of a Ukrainian gas company had on Obama administration policy with regard to Ukraine. And it offered no evidence to support one of President Donald Trump's more incendiary allegations — that Joe Biden pressured Ukraine to fire its top prosecutor as a way to protect his son.

Biden's campaign immediately panned the report, released six weeks before the election, as an effort by an ally of Trump to damage his election opponent.

Trump has repeatedly drawn attention to Hunter Biden's work in Ukraine even as his own administration has warned of a concerted Russian effort to denigrate Joe Biden and asserted that a Ukrainian lawmaker who is involved in spreading anti-Biden claims is an "active Russian agent."

Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, whose Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee is one of the two panels that released the 87-page report, had acknowledged in interviews his goal of making the document public before the election, telling The Associated Press last month that the "American people deserve the truth" about his probe.

The investigation produced stark political divisions, with Democrats accusing Johnson of a politically motivated initiative at a time when they said the Homeland

Security Committee should be focused on the coronavirus pandemic response and other, less partisan issues. Even before the report was released, the Biden campaign issued a detailed statement aiming to rebut point-by-point allegations that it said had long been debunked by media organizations as well as by U.S. and Ukrainian officials.

The Senate report examines Hunter Biden's dealings in Ukraine, where he held a paid seat on the board of gas company Burisma, and alleges that work posed a conflict of interest because Biden was vice president at the time and dealing with Ukraine policy.

It references a 2016 email from George Kent, the former acting deputy chief of mission at the Kyiv embassy, that described the presence of Hunter Biden on the Burisma board as "very awkward for all U.S. officials pushing an anticorruption agenda in Ukraine." Kent testified about his concerns during the impeachment proceedings against Trump last year.

Another State Department official, Amos Hochstein, is described in the report as having raised concerns directly to Biden because he was concerned that Russians were using his son's role with the company to sow disinformation.

The report says that even though State Department officials regarded the head of the company, Mykola Zlokevsky, as corrupt, Biden did not confront him.

"What the Chairmen discovered during the course of this investigation is that the Obama administration knew that Hunter Biden's position on Burisma's board was problematic and did interfere in the efficient execution of policy with respect to Ukraine," the report says.

"Moreover, this investigation has illustrated the extent to which officials within the Obama administration ignored the glaring warning signs when the vice president's son joined the board of a company owned by a corrupt Ukrainian oligarch," it adds.

Even so, the Republican senators acknowledge that the extent to which Hunter Biden's role on the board affected Ukraine policy is "unclear," and the report does not describe how, if at all, specific policy decisions were influenced by Biden's position.

Notably, the report makes limited mention of the claim by Trump and some supporters that Biden pressured Ukraine to fire its top prosecutor, Viktor Shokin, as a way to stymie an investigation into Burisma's owner. The allegations were central to the impeachment case against Trump after he asked Ukraine's president in a telephone call last year to investigate the Bidens.

The report includes only six references, including in footnotes, to Shokin and does not expose new information about any role Biden may have had in his ouster.

The Biden campaign pointed to news reports and public statements showing there was no active investigation into Burisma at the time of Shokin's ouster in 2016, and that the firing of Shokin was broadly sought by U.S. and European officials and reflected the official Obama administration policy.

There is no evidence of wrongdoing by the Bidens, and Hunter Biden has denied using his influence with his father to aid Burisma. But Republicans who came to Trump's defense in this year's impeachment trial asked for further investigations of his activities. Johnson, a close ally of Trump, took the lead.

"As the coronavirus death toll climbs and Wisconsinites struggle with joblessness, Ron Johnson has wasted months diverting the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee away from any oversight of the catastrophically botched federal response to the pandemic, a threat Sen. Johnson has dismissed by saying that 'death is an unavoidable part of life,'" Biden campaign spokesman Andrew Bates said in a statement.

Source:

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