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Engel Demands Investigation Into Trump-Putin Summit (/press-releases? ID=AEAED538-54A2-4C8E-AF09- 26666A695732)

September 13, 2018

WASHINGTON—Representative Eliot L. Engel, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, today delivered the following statement at a full committee markup on a measure to require the Administration to produce records dealing with the Trump-Putin Helsinki Summit:

“Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And as I’ve said many, many times privately and publicly, I want to thank you for the fair way you’ve always run this Committee. I know this is an unusual situation for us—for both of us.

"But we've reached the point with this Administration when I believe it's time for tougher action to be taken. For 18 months, we have been trying to exercise basic oversight of the State Department. Two Secretaries of State have been here and have said they'd be responsive to our Committee's requests.

"It hasn't happened.

"We've been stonewalled over and over again. We've heard excuse after excuse after excuse. And on the rare occasion like today that the Administration sends officials to testify before our Committee, we rarely get the answers we need.

"This has frustrated me, and I've heard the same from many of our members. And the secret meeting between President Trump and President Putin in Helsinki was the last straw—literally.

"Vladimir Putin unleashed an attack on our democracy to try to get Donald Trump elected. President Trump cozies up to Putin at every turn. He sides with Putin over our own intelligence community.

"So, when they went into a room together—no staff, no advisors—just the two of them and interpreters—alarm bells went off all over Washington, DC and around the world. It was unprecedented under any circumstances, and particularly troubling in light of the Trump-Russia Scandal swirling around this President and his administration. As Special Counsel Mueller continues to rack up indictments and convictions, my concern is only growing.

"Now, two months later, the alarm is still going off because the American people still have no idea what was discussed in that meeting between Putin and Trump. We need to know. This is a matter of national security. And when an administration—and this would go for any administration of either party—shows such bizarre deference to an adversary who clearly means us harm, it falls to Congress to get the answers. That's our job.

"Mr. Chairman, I know you've been working hard to get Secretary Pompeo in front of our Committee so we can all ask these questions. It's outrageous that he hasn't come before us—especially since he did pay the Senate that courtesy. But you have tried to allow us to

do our job, and I'm grateful for your effort. This administration just doesn't seem to respect Congress's role as a coequal branch of government.

"So, we're running out of options. This resolution that Mr. Boyle has introduced represents one of the few tools Congress has in its rules to get answers from an administration. I share the frustration that led Mr. Boyle to offer this measure, and I fully support his effort to find out what happened in President Trump's failed summit with the Russian dictator in Helsinki.

"I think it's a pretty reasonable set of requests. I wish it weren't necessary. I wish the State Department would do what Secretaries Tillerson and Pompeo promised, which is to respond to our document requests and heed our efforts to carry out Congress's constitutional responsibilities by conducting basic oversight.

"But they have not, and we need to face facts: the Trump Administration is not going to give us the information we need willingly.

"Congress has requested. They've said, 'No.' What we're left with is for Congress to demand. And because that's the only option left—for Congress to demand—we're also left with only one question: what will Congress decide to do?

"We're not the first Committee to take up a resolution like this since the start of the Trump presidency. In other cases, markups have descended into partisan rancor. Certainly, they haven't resulted in getting any information from the executive branch. In my view, the Republican leadership in the House has opted to cover for this administration rather than allowing this body to do its job and exercise our checks and balances.

"I'm confident—based on this Committee's culture under your leadership, Mr. Chairman—that this markup won't follow that path. In fact, I hope we can have a good debate about Mr. Boyle's resolution, because if anyone thinks we—and the American people—shouldn't know what happened in that meeting, I'd like to hear why.

"And I'd like to hear that debate continue on the House floor. As I said, the only question left is, 'What will Congress decide to do?' It should be up to the entire House to weigh in on that decision. We shouldn't end this debate here. We shouldn't end it today.

“And so, Mr. Chairman, respectfully, I must oppose your motion. And if it’s voted down, I’ll offer a motion of my own to report this resolution favorably, designating Mr. Boyle of Pennsylvania to call it up for consideration by the House.

“Again, Mr. Chairman, as I have said many times publicly and privately, I’m grateful to you for your fairness and leadership, and I yield back.”

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