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Schiff Invites Cambridge Analytica Whistleblower to Provide Testimony Before Intelligence Committee

Washington, March 19, 2018

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), the Ranking Member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, sent a letter to Christopher Wylie through his attorney inviting him to testify as part of the Minority's ongoing investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election after news reports in the Guardian, the New York Times, and Channel 4 in the United Kingdom reported Mr. Wylie's account of Cambridge Analytica's alleged improper acquisition of more than 50 million Facebook profiles to harvest data of unsuspecting users. The Committee's Minority is seeking testimony from the whistleblower about the reported misappropriation of private data, as well as information to determine where the data was stored, how it was used, and whether third parties accessed and exploited the information, including in Russia.

Over the weekend, Schiff also commented about the reported misappropriation of Facebook data, and investigative steps that must be taken by the House Intelligence Committee and the Congress – including the need to compel further testimony by Cambridge Analytica personnel and receive a briefing by Facebook on the reports:

“Revelations that Cambridge Analytica secretly acquired the personal, private information of more than 50 million Facebook users without their permission or that of Facebook, must be thoroughly investigated. This raises serious questions about the level of detail that Cambridge Analytica knew about users, whether it acquired that information illegally and whether it sought to abuse that information in support of President Trump's political campaign in the United States or Brexit in the United Kingdom. The company has repeatedly touted its ability to influence voters through ‘psychographic’ targeting and has claimed it was the fundamental reason that Donald Trump won the 2016 election. Indeed, it may be that through Cambridge Analytica, the Trump campaign made use of illegitimately-acquired data on millions of Americans in order to help sway the election.

“Reports that an American professor with links to Russia was at the center of this illicit transfer of information raises further questions, which the Committee must investigate. Despite our request, and as set out in our status report, the Committee has not had the opportunity to talk with numerous Cambridge Analytica personnel who may have knowledge of this and other issues — they must now be brought in for interviews. CEO Alexander Nix must also return for further questioning, if necessary under subpoena. Over the objection of the Minority, Nix was never brought in for questioning although he was frequently in the United States. Instead, he was the subject of a video interview away from the Hill and during a day when members had votes and could not participate for much of the session. The Committee would also greatly benefit by hearing from the whistleblower named in today's report, Christopher Wylie, and we plan to reach out to him in the coming days.

“Facebook must also answer important questions about why it provided private user information to an academic, how they have informed users in advance of these kinds of data transfers, and whether it can demonstrate that this data has indeed been destroyed. They must also answer questions about how they have notified users about this breach of their personal data. Facebook's decision to suspend their relationship with Nix and the professor is the right one, but they must explain the long delay in doing so and how they will ensure the protection of users from malicious access to their personal information.”

The text of the letter to Mr. Christopher Wylie's counsel is below:

As part of a recent investigation by the Guardian, the New York Times, and the United Kingdom's Channel 4 News, your client, Christopher Wylie, has described Cambridge Analytica's improper acquisition of more than 50 million Facebook profiles to harvest data of unsuspecting users. Cambridge Analytica reportedly obtained access to this data beginning in 2014 after entering into a commercial venture with Cambridge University-affiliated psychology professor Dr.

Aleksandr Kogan and his company, Global Science Research (GSR). Dr. Kogan, who appears to have links to Russian institutions, is accused of misrepresenting to Facebook that he was conducting academic research.

Your client has described Cambridge Analytica as having been formed on the basis of using Facebook data to target American voters. This database is reported to have provided the basis for the algorithms that became the foundation of Cambridge Analytica's election support to political candidates, allowing it to exploit the private social media activity of a large swath of the American electorate and develop techniques that reportedly underpinned its work on President Trump's campaign. Recent reporting suggests that Cambridge Analytica in fact still possesses most or all of this data. Press reports also indicate that Cambridge Analytica, and its parent company SCL Group appear to have had contact in 2014 and 2015 with executives from Russian energy company Lukoil, during which Lukoil expressed interest in how Cambridge Analytica's data was used to target American voters.

These revelations raise serious questions about the veracity of the testimony the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence received from Cambridge Analytica CEO Alexander Nix. If your client's account and documentation is accurate, this misappropriation of private data is a serious invasion of the privacy interests of the American people by Cambridge Analytica and potentially other individuals and entities, and raises important questions about Cambridge Analytica's activities on behalf of then-candidate Donald Trump's campaign during the 2016 U.S. elections, the specific roles of persons of interest, including Steve Bannon and Robert and Rebekah Mercer, as well as the firm's ties to Russia.

We would appreciate the opportunity to interview Mr. Wylie on these matters and review relevant evidence in his possession. Press reports indicate that Mr. Wylie presented reporters and authorities in the United Kingdom with "emails, invoices, contracts and bank transfers," which collectively demonstrate the veracity of his account. To ensure our investigation is as complete as possible, we respectfully request that your client preserve and produce these documents, as well as any additional documents, records, and electronically stored information that reasonably could lead to the discovery of any facts related to our inquiry.

We will work with you to arrange your client's interview at a time and location that is mutually convenient, subsequent to the production of documents. We respectfully request your written reply, and the production of documents, by April 6, 2018.

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Minority Privacy Policy

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