Twitter Thread by David Frum

David Frum
@davidfrum

I got overnight via email a query from @briansflood at Fox News, the principal part of which I reproduce below. I answered by email too. I'll append that reply in the next threaded tweet:

- MESSAGE: I hope all is well. Do you plan on revisiting you Oct. tweet condemning anyone who publicized the NY Post Hunter Biden story?

@briansflood My reply:

The story that its author at the NYPost refused to sign? That relied on a source who has since vanished with no known address? The story that your colleagues at the news divisions of the Wall Street Journal and Fox refused when it was shopped to them before the NYPost agreed to act as publisher of last resort? That story?

DF

Hunter Biden's dubious business activities have been reported for years. Here for example is @TheAtlantic in September 2019, year *before* @nypost https://t.co/qZBTpyuysM

IDEAS

Hunter Biden's Perfectly Legal, Socially Acceptable Corruption

Donald Trump committed an impeachable offense, but prominent Americans also shouldn't be leveraging their names for payoffs from shady clients abroad.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

That emails attributed to Hunter Biden were circulating was also known well before the NYPost story in October. Here's TIME magazine https://t.co/JvpEKdG0U4

BY SIMON SHUSTER OCTOBER 21, 2020 6:38 PM EDT

Explicit photos and emails purportedly belonging to Hunter Biden were circulating in Ukraine last year at the same time that Rudy Giuliani was searching for dirt there on former Vice President Joe Biden, two people approached about the material during that period tell TIME.

What @NYPost added to the work earlier done by others was a new *origin* story for the materials that circulated in Ukraine in 2019. When other media organizations attempted to corroborate that story, hijinx ensued. https://t.co/ZJGZWq7etU @thedailybeast account

Mac Isaac said he had a medical condition that prevented him from actually seeing who dropped off the laptop but that he believed it to be Hunter Biden's because of a sticker related to the Beau Biden Foundation that was on it. He said that Hunter Biden actually dropped off three laptops for repair, an abundance of hardware that he chalked up to the Biden son being "rich."

Throughout the interview, Mac Isaac switched back and forth from saying he reached out to law enforcement after viewing the files in the laptop to saying that it was actually the Federal Bureau of Investigation that contacted him. At one point, Mac Isaac claimed that he was emailing someone from the FBI about the laptop. At another point he claimed a special agent from the Baltimore office had contacted him after he alerted the FBI to the device's existence. At another point, he said the FBI reached out to him for "help accessing his drive."

I doubt that anybody at any responsible media organization holds any particular brief for Hunter Biden. I sure don't. If he did wrong, he should face the consequences. But Hunter Biden's legal situation was not what was at issue with the NY Post report.

What was at issue in the NYPost story were these two questions: "Is this material about Hunter Biden being promoted by Steve Bannon and Rudy Giuliani genuine? If yes, where does this material come from?"

In November 2019, Russian spy agencies hacked servers at Burisma, the Ukrainian company on whose board Hunter Biden sat. The NYTimes reported in January 2020: https://t.co/Vhz03pg3o1

> It is not yet clear what the hackers found, or precisely what they were searching for. But the experts say the timing and scale of the attacks suggest that the Russians could be searching for potentially embarrassing material on the Bidens — the same kind of information that Mr. Trump wanted from Ukraine when he pressed for an investigation of the Bidens and Burisma, setting off a chain of events that led to his impeachment.

When the Trump White House shopped purported Hunter Biden materials to reputable news organizations like the Wall Street Journal, reporters went to work verifying authenticity and sourcing. That process unnerved the Trump White House and its allies. https://t.co/HI4QbH1UkS

> As the Trump team waited with excited anticipation for a Journal exposé, the newspaper did its due diligence: Mr. Bender and Mr. Beckett handed the story off to a well-regarded China correspondent, James Areddy, and a Capitol Hill reporter who had followed the Hunter Biden story, Andrew Duehren. Mr. Areddy interviewed Mr. Bobulinski. They began drafting an article.

The Trump White House and its allies wanted their purported Hunter Biden materials to be published with no uncomfortable questions asked about its authenticity and its origins. For that, they turned to the New York Post. https://t.co/HI4QbH1UkS

> Then things got messy. Without warning his notional allies, Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor and now a lawyer for President Trump, burst onto the scene with the tabloid version of the McLean crew's carefully laid plot. Mr. Giuliani delivered a cache of documents of questionable provenance — but containing some of the same emails — to The New York Post, a sister publication to The Journal in Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Mr. Giuliani had been working with the former Trump aide Steve Bannon, who also began leaking some of the emails to favored right-wing outlets. Mr. Giuliani's complicated claim that the emails came from a laptop Hunter Biden had abandoned, and his refusal to let some reporters examine the laptop, cast a pall over the story — as did The Post's reporting, which alleged but could not prove that Joe Biden had been involved in his son's activities.

Even after the NYPost published, the Trump team still refused other media organizations the information they needed to verify the NYPost story. This behavior - plus the selective leaking to pro-Trump outlets that didn't bother with verification - naturally sowed suspicion.

Now there's a new report on DoJ investigation of Hunter Biden's activities. That report is of course something every media organization will want to dig deeper into. https://t.co/N3iJiSlZve

LEGAL

Justice Department's interest in Hunter Biden covered more than taxes

Federal prosecutors also have investigated foreign ties, possible money laundering.

But those latest stories, properly sourced, do not confer retrospective rehabilitation on what the NY Post was doing in October - or on the Trump White House officials doing Trump campaign work at taxpayer expense.

Last point. It very often happens that presidents must deal with family members who try to trade on their relationship to power: James Roosevelt, Donald Nixon, Billy Carter, Hugh Rodham - it's a recurring problem.

I've suggested from time to time that one way to deal with that problem is to require publication of tax returns by any member of the First or Second family who accepts Secret Service protection.

But even that answer - tax returns for Secret Service - only carries us so far. In the end, there's probably no once-and-for-all legal remedy to the problem of relatives trading on power. The ultimate guarantor of ethical standards must be vigilant media and a concerned public.

At the same time, it's essential to keep a sense of proportion. For the past four years, the US government has been led by the most corrupt president in history. Trump's children and their spouses eagerly grabbed their pieces of the action too, again on a scale never before seen.

It may turn out that Hunter Biden is our next generation Jimmy Roosevelt or Donald Nixon. It's right to expose that, and to demand that the Biden administration distance from him.

But when the Trump family tries to excuse its massive depredations by invoking Hunter Biden's activities - we have left earth's orbit.

When Donald Trump Jr. asks, "Can you imagine if I did ... " the right answer is : Junior, you did that -and worse- just before breakfast today

So there's my answer to the @briansflood query - and to the pro-Trump trolls who have been frolicking in my Twitter timeline over the past 24 hours. I'll put it here, where they live - aware that the truth may not matter much to them, but confident it matters to everybody else.