



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Suzanne Scott
Chief Executive Officer
Fox News

Jay Wallace
President and Executive Editor
Fox News

Bryan Boughton
Washington Bureau Chief
Fox News

Dear Suzanne, Jay, and Bryan:

I write to you about Fox News Channel and Fox News Digital coverage of the false, discredited “bribery” allegation involving President Joe Biden, which Fox outlets have given significant coverage over the past year.

In May 2023, Fox began promoting stories of this allegation, pointing to sources who said a “foreign witness” had brought this allegation through “intermediaries” to the Trump Justice Department.¹ Over the following weeks, the network and digital properties continued to promote this story aggressively. On May 10, 2023, Fox News legal analyst Gregg Jarrett wrote that this allegation could prove President Biden committed crimes.² A June 2, 2023, story cited anonymous sources to report the allegation came from a “highly credible” source.³ A June 8, 2023, story cited anonymous sources to call this a “‘pay-to-play’ scheme.”⁴ A July 20, 2023, story led with allegations that President Biden “coerced” a foreign national into a bribe.⁵ I would cite the number of times Jesse Watters and Sean Hannity promoted this allegation and made false statements about President Biden on primetime television throughout this time period, but the footnote citations would fill multiple pages.

¹ *Whistleblower Alleges Feds Sat on Allegations of Biden Family Corruption in 2018*, Fox News (May 10, 2023) (available at <https://www.foxnews.com/media/whistleblower-alleges-feds-sat-allegations-biden-family-corruption-2018>)

² *The Explosive New Evidence of Biden Family’s Breathtaking Corruption*, Fox News (May 10, 2023) (available at <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/explosive-new-evidence-biden-family-breathtaking-corruption>)

³ *Person Alleging Biden Criminal Bribery Scheme Is a ‘Highly Credibly’ FBI Source Used Since Obama Admin: Source*, Fox News (June 2, 2023) (available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/person-alleging-biden-criminal-bribery-scheme-is-a-highly-credible-fbi-source-used-since-obama-admin-source>)

⁴ *Joe Biden Allegedly Paid \$5M By Burisma Executive As Part of a Bribery Scheme, According to FBI Document*, Fox News (June 8, 2023) (“A source familiar said according to the document, the \$5 million payments appeared to reference a kind of ‘retainer’ Burisma intended to pay the Bidens to deal with a number of issues, including the investigation led by Shokin. Another source referred to the arrangement as a ‘pay-to-play’ scheme.”) (available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-allegedly-paid-5-million-by-burisma-executive>)

⁵ *Bidens Allegedly ‘Coerced’ Burisma CEO to Pay Them Millions to Help Get Ukraine Prosecutor Fired: FBI Form*, Fox News (July 20, 2023) (available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/grassley-releases-unclassified-fbi-form-containing-details-of-biden-criminal-bribery-scheme-with-burisma-ceo>)

One longtime Fox News host rightly scoffed at the ridiculousness of this discredited allegation.⁶ The next month he was reportedly fired from his hosting job and left the network.⁷

At the time, President Biden accurately dismissed this false allegation as “malarkey,” and instead of reporting on the facts of why the allegation was false, Fox reported that the President was “scorched” by rightwing “commentators across Twitter.”⁸

As you of course now know, the source of this allegation has been federally indicted for making the whole thing up. As you likely also know, a recent public court filing in this case alleged that this source stated he had been in contact with Russian intelligence operatives. As *The Washington Post* reported: “Smirnov’s indictment and detention memo suggest the allegations were not only false, but possibly a Russian-inspired smear.”⁹

Despite this, Fox has taken no steps to retract, correct, or update its reporting on this false allegation from 2023.

As CNN reported recently: “Fox News’ stable of hosts have declined to properly correct the record” and “the outlet’s supposedly non-partisan news website has also failed to update its ‘EXCLUSIVE’ reporting from last summer publicly surfacing the informant’s false claims. Articles by reporter Brooke Singman advancing Smirnov’s bribery allegations remain unaltered on the FoxNews.com website without a correction or mention that the one-time FBI informant has been charged with lying to the federal law enforcement about the very claims she reported.”¹⁰ The New York Times likewise recently reported that, instead of acknowledging the latest developments responsibly, Fox News personalities have chosen to respond by pushing new false conspiracy theories.¹¹

⁶ *Fox News Host Scoffs at Biden Bribery Whistleblower Story*, The Daily Beast (May 4, 2023) (Geraldo Rivera: “Does anybody really believe President Joe Biden was involved in a criminal bribery scheme? Dollars to donuts it’s another bogus, blowhard, pretend whistleblower.”) (available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fox-news-host-geraldo-rivera-scoffs-at-biden-bribery-whistleblower-story>)

⁷ *Geraldo Rivera Exits Fox News After He Says He Was ‘Fired’ From ‘The Five,’* USA Today (June 30, 2023) (available at <https://usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2023/06/30/geraldo-rivera-fired-fox-news-exits-the-five/70373256007/>)

⁸ *Conservatives Warn Biden After He Jokes About Alleged Bribery Scandal: ‘Accountability Is Coming,’* Fox News (June 9, 2023) (available at <https://www.foxnews.com/media/conservatives-warn-biden-jokes-alleged-bribery-scandal-accountability-coming>)

⁹ *Informant Charged with Lies About Bidens Also Claimed Russian Contacts, Feds Say*, The Washington Post (Feb. 20, 2024) (available at www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/02/20/hunter-biden-smirnov-lying-indictment-lowell/).

¹⁰ *Fox News Hyped the Bogus FBI Informant Claims Against Biden. Now It’s Refusing to Walk Them Back*, CNN (February 22, 2024) (available at <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/22/media/fox-news-bogus-fbi-informant-biden/index.html>)

¹¹ *A Biden Accuser Was Discredited. Right-Wing Media Is Undeterred.*, The New York Times (February 23, 2024) (“On Tuesday, a few hours after the credibility of a key source boosting Republican efforts to impeach President Biden collapsed in spectacular fashion, the Fox News host Jesse Watters offered his viewers a reassuring message. ‘It’s a smear job,’ Mr. Watters said. ... ‘They say he has ties to Russian intelligence; where did they get that from?’ Mr. Watters told his prime-time audience, noting that Mr. Smirnov had previously been considered credible by the F.B.I. ‘They just gave the media and the Democrats permission to call the Ukraine bribes and the Biden impeachment ‘Russian disinformation’ for the rest of the year.’ ... The Fox News star Jeanine Pirro addressed the

We feel strongly that all Fox News Digital articles on this topic should at a minimum be updated with editor's notes informing readers that the source of this allegation has been federally indicted for making it up. We also feel strongly that Fox News Channel television personalities like Hannity and Watters, among others, should inform their viewers on air that they have been sharing a discredited allegation from a source who has been federally indicted for making it up.

In 2020, Fox News' "Brain Room" research team reportedly warned the network about disinformation on this very topic and from sources just like this.¹² Fox even reportedly fired one of its on-air contributors who had been a leader in promoting this disinformation.¹³ So it is clear that Fox itself, at one point, acknowledged the dangers of promulgating false allegations on this topic from these types of sources – yet, less than four years later, Fox has alarmingly reversed course. This is in need of correction.

My colleagues copied here and myself are happy to address any questions you may have, and we are always available to discuss these matters, or ones like them, with you.

Sincerely,

Ian Sams

Special Assistant to the President
White House Spokesman for Oversight &
Investigations

cc: Anita Dunn
Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor to the President

Karine Jean-Pierre
Assistant to the President and Press Secretary

Ben LaBolt
Assistant to the President and Director of Communications

matter on 'Hannity' on Thursday night. 'You've got this guy Smirnov who was a respected confidential informant for 10 years by the F.B.I.,' she said. 'They paid him money, he was so credible. Now, all of a sudden, a couple months ago, they decide, 'Oh, he's not credible,' because he's claiming that, you know, Joe Biden and Hunter Biden were engaged in a problem.'") (available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/23/business/media/right-wing-media-alexander-smirnov.html>)

¹² *Fox News Internal Document Bashes Pro-Trump Fox Regulars for Spreading 'Disinformation,'* The Daily Beast (February 6, 2020) (available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fox-news-internal-document-bashes-john-solomon-joe-digenova-and-rudy-giuliani-for-spreading-disinformation>)

¹³ *Fox News Parts Ways With John Solomon, Architect of Trump's Ukraine Conspiracies,* (November 12, 2020) (available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fox-news-parts-ways-with-john-solomon-architect-of-trumps-ukraine-conspiracies>)