So do you recall getting an inquiry from the CI -- excuse me, the intelligence community in September of 2016 about a concern that the Clinton campaign was going to create a scandal regarding Trump and Russia?

COMEY: I do not.

GRAHAM: You don't remember getting a investigatory lead from the intelligence community? Hang on a second. Let me find my document here. September the 7th, 2016, the U.S. intelligence officials forwarded an investigative referral of FBI -- to FBI Director James Comey and direct -- Assistant Director of Counterintelligence Peter Strzok regarding U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's approval of a plan concerning U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump and Russian hackers hampering U.S. elections as a means of distracting the public from her use of a private email server. You don't remember getting that or being taught -- that -- that (inaudible)...

COMEY: (inaudible) -- it doesn't ring any bells with me.

GRAHAM: OK. Well, that's a pretty stunning thing, it didn't ring a bell, but it did come to you.

Let's just end with this: You get this inquiry from the intelligence community to look at the Clinton campaign basically trying to create a distraction accusing Trump of being a Russian agent or a Russian stooge or whatever to distract from her email server problems. And how far-fetched is that, Mr. Comey, when we now know that the Democratic Party, through Fusion GPS, hired Christopher Steele, a foreign agent who had a very strong bias against Trump, who hired a Russian sub-source who the FBI believed to be a Russian spy to compile a dossier that was a bunch of crap to be used against an American citizen working for the Trump campaign. You already knew that. Seems to me you'd want to investigate other allegations, but you're telling me that you don't recall this.

COMEY: I'm sorry, Senator. Is there a question?



GRAHAM: Yes. You don't recall this inquiry I just read about September the -- 2016?

COMEY: No, as said, it doesn't -- again, I'm (inaudible)...

GRAHAM: Do you remember being told...

COMEY: ... but it -- it doesn't sound familiar.

GRAHAM: Do you -- do you remember being told by the investigate -- the intelligence community -- remember the episode with Trump in the hotel?

COMEY: (inaudible)...

GRAHAM: With the -- with the hookers and the dossier?

COMEY: Yes, I remember that portion of (inaudible)...

GRAHAM: OK, that was -- that was pretty hard to ignore.

COMEY: (inaudible)...

GRAHAM: Do you remember in December, the Intelligence Committee basically said, "A U.S. -- a U.S. intelligence community report contained information about the falsity of the details of Trump's sexual activity in Moscow, and assessed that they were the product of Russian intelligence services infilterating -- infiltrating a source into Steele's network? So this is from the Horowitz report. In other words, the intelligence community had assessed that the dossier's description of a sexual escapade was actually a Russian disinformation campaign. Did you know that when it came out?

GRAHAM: Did you have a duty to look at the -- any allegations regarding Clinton and Russia?

COMEY: I -- I don't know what you mean.

GRAHAM: Well you say you had a duty to look at allegations about the Trump campaign being involved with the Russians. You've got a letter now from Ratcliffe saying that there was a -- they intercepted information about an effort in July where Hillary Clinton approved a -- an effort to link Trump to Russia, the mob. Did you have an investigation to look and see if whether that was true?

COMEY: I can't answer that. I've read Mr. Ratcliffe's letter, which frankly I have trouble understanding.

GRAHAM: OK. Thank you very much.

FEINSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The President and his allies argue that the FBI should never have investigated the Trump campaign's ties to Russia.

However, Special Counsel Mueller and the Senate Intelligence Committee found that the Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort gave internal polling data and campaign strategy to a Russian intelligence officer.

The Senate Intelligence Committee issued the bipartisan finding that Manafort was a grave counterintelligence threat. I'd like to put in the record this report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Mr. Chairman.

GRAHAM: Without objection.

We now know that President Trump owes more than $400 million in debt to largely-unknown sources. In 2014 the president's son said the Trump organization did not rely on American banks for financing. Instead, they received all the funding we need out of Russia. Now, that was a Trump statement and not anybody else's. You stated that you think it's possible the Russians have something over the President. Why do you believe that this is a possibility? Have you ever felt this way about an American president?

COMEY: I never felt that way about an American president and I don't know whether the Russians have something over President Trump but it's difficult to explain his conduct, his statements in any other way, especially his refusal to criticize Vladimir Putin even in public.

So it raises a significant question and obviously the question is only deepened by this closure, if it's true, of significant indebtedness.

LEAHY: Enough to raise suspicions, in your mind, based on your -- based on your experience. Thank you. Now yesterday, reportedly over the objections of career officials, the Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe declassified and released unverified Russian intelligence, likely disinformation, about former Secretary Clinton. The information was rejected by the Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee.

Now Mr. Ratcliffe has refused to testify in public about our own intelligence agencies assessment of global threats to the United States, including from Russia. Are you concerned, Mr. Comey, that intelligence leaders hand picked for their partisan loyalties are weaponizing intelligence by selectively releasing foreign disinformation and withholding credible U.S. intelligence assessments?

COMEY: I don't understand Mr. Ratcliffe's letter well enough to comment. It's confusing, it contains within it a statement I think that is unverified information. So I really don't know what he's doing.

repeated misrepresentations, it could no longer trust what the Federal Bureau of Investigation agency you led, what it said in subsequent cases. That I suggest to you is an incredible dereliction of duty, indeed a betrayal of your responsibility as director of the FBI.

If I could, Mr. Chairman just one last thing I want to follow up on, the letter to Chairman Graham from John Ratcliffe, which I know you've seen Mr. Comey as you mentioned it earlier. Mr. Ratcliffe says "On 7th September 2016, U.S. intelligence officials forwarded an investigative referral to FBI Director James Comey regarding U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's approval of a plan concerning Donald Trump and Russian hackers as a means of distracting the public from her use of a private mail server," end quote. Did you open an investigation?

COMEY: I don't know what that refers to. I said earlier that does not ring any bells with me when I read that.

HAWLEY: You did not receive any investigative referral of this nature?

COMEY: I don't remember it. I don't remember receiving anything that is described in that letter.

HAWLEY: I have to say, Mr. Chairman, I realize my time has expired. I find it extraordinary that a referral from the IC to the FBI regarding Hillary Clinton's campaign and potential illicit activity received no, no attention for the FBI, so little attention the director doesn't even recall it. And yet, the director and others had plenty of time to go and seek surveillance warrants during an ongoing presidential campaign, warrants so flawed that the FISA Court has now said it can't trust what the FBI says in future cases.

This is an extraordinary abuse of power. And it's time we held people responsible for it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

GRAHAM: Thanks. Senator Blumenthal.