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From: [Redacted]
To: [Redacted] Neal Higgins; [Redacted]
Subject: RE: Benghazi Committee -- Trey Gowdy injects Benghazi into the 2016 campaign
Date: Thursday, April 14, 2016 12:52:11 PM

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I am just grateful to dana Milbank for publishing this in time for our meeting this afternoon.

From: [Redacted]
Sent: Thursday, April 14, 2016 12:46 PM
To: [Redacted] Neal Higgins
[Redacted]
Subject: RE: Benghazi Committee -- Trey Gowdy injects Benghazi into the 2016 campaign

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The Post says there will be a declassification review so it has to happen ☺

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From: [Redacted]
Sent: Thursday, April 14, 2016 12:01 PM
To: [Redacted] Neal Higgins; [Redacted]
[Redacted]
Subject: FW: Benghazi Committee -- Trey Gowdy injects Benghazi into the 2016 campaign

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FYI -

Trey Gowdy injects Benghazi into the 2016 campaign

By Dana Milbank/Washington Post
April 13

Is Trey Gowdy planning a July surprise?

The chairman of the Select Committee on Benghazi went to ground after he and his colleagues grilled Hillary Clinton in October. They haven't had a single hearing since then (and had only three public hearings before that one), though they occasionally send news releases reminding the world that their 700-day-old investigation continues.

But that is about to change. Gowdy, after blowing through several previous deadlines he set, has said to expect a final report "before summer," and Republicans say they are drafting it now. In another indication that the

rollout is approaching, Gowdy last month stopped giving Democrats transcripts of witness interviews. This move, ostensibly to prevent leaks, diminishes the minority's ability respond to allegations contained in the majority report.

Depending on how long the declassification review takes, the Benghazi report is on track to drop by mid-July, just before Congress recesses for the conventions and at a time when Republicans will be in need of a distraction from the Trump-Cruz standoff. If the review takes longer (they typically last from a few weeks to a several months), it could come out in September, in the campaign's homestretch.

Either scenario would confirm what critics of the panel have said all along (and what Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy incautiously confirmed) – that the panel is a political exercise designed to damage Clinton. Fox News host Greta van Susteren, writing in the Huffington Post a year ago, argued that “dragging the investigation into 2016 looks political” and that releasing the report right before the election “looks awful” and “sends a bad message about fairness.”

If the report comes out in 2016, she wrote, “it is fair to draw an adverse inference against the Committee – an adverse inference of playing politics. . . . Whatever the findings are in this investigation – it will forever be plagued by allegations of unfairness, and politics if this investigation is dragged into 2016.”

Back then, Gowdy told van Susteren that “I want it done before 2016” and that “it's not going to come out in the middle of 2016.” The panel had originally contemplated finishing work in October 2015. Gowdy later shifted that to the end of 2015, then this spring.

He will argue that Obama administration foot-dragging slowed the investigation; one batch of documents, delivered Friday, had been requested 17 months earlier. But it's hard to pin the delay on the White House when the committee has continued in recent weeks to add new witnesses. The panel waited to request interviews with former CIA director David Petraeus and former defense secretary Leon Panetta until after Clinton testified. Those two, along with national security adviser Susan Rice and deputy Ben Rhodes, are among at least 35 interviewed since October. Though most of the committee's work has been a reread of previous investigations, it claims it has received more than 72,000 pages of records not seen by other congressional committees – not exactly a picture of stonewalling.

Gowdy and his staff, apparently aware of the perception problem, have been releasing defensive statements to the public. When the report is released, “I'm confident the value and fairness of our investigation will then be abundantly clear to everyone,” Gowdy said on April 8. The majority on April 6 issued a statement taking issue with the “idea that the committee's October hearing [with Clinton] was ‘a flop’ that produced ‘no new information.’” Gowdy previously promised the report findings would be “eye-opening.”

One eye-opening thing has already happened: Gregory Hicks, the U.S. diplomat in Libya who criticized the administration response, is now on detail from the State Department working as a legislative assistant to Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), who previously said Hicks's “shocking testimony” confirmed a “Benghazi whitewash” by the administration.

Another eye-opening thing: The panel never agreed on rules or a budget (some \$6.5 million has been spent). And the probe, after a respectable start, quickly devolved into the mix of unfounded allegations, selective leaks and partisan sniping that characterized the preceding Benghazi investigation by Rep. Darrel Issa's oversight panel.

Democrats don't expect to see the majority's report before it is made public. Rep. Elijah Cummings (Md.), the top Democrat on the panel, said in a statement Wednesday that he expects “an excessively long rehash of old Republican

allegations that were disproved long ago."

Expect a lot of findings questioning Clinton's honesty (she told her family the Benghazi attack was the work of terrorists but misled the American public), judgment (her policy led to the Libya attack) and humanity (she was indifferent to diplomats' security). These themes dovetail nicely with the general-election campaign Republicans plan to run against Clinton. This, like the timing of the Benghazi report, is a curious coincidence.

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