

Rand Paul invites Russians to U.S. as they claim no election interference

WASHINGTON (TNS) — Sen. Rand Paul invited top Russian government officials to visit the U.S. later this year to continue a dialogue on important national security issues, he announced Monday.

The Kentucky Republican, who is leading a legislative delegation in the country this week, met with Konstantin Kosachev, the chairman of the Russian Federation Council Committee on Foreign Affairs. That committee is the Russian equivalent of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee that Paul sits on.

“Engagement is vital to our national security and peace around the world,” Paul said in a statement.

“Today, I met with Chairman Kosachev, and we agreed on the importance of continued dialogue. I invited the Russian Federation to send a delegation to the Capitol, and they have agreed to take this important next step,” Paul said.

At the conclusion of the hourlong meeting between Paul and Kosachev, Kosachev reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin’s claim that his government did not interfere in the 2016 U.S. election.

There is unanimous agreement among U.S. intelligence agencies that the Russian government directed extensive influence operations to sow racial, political, and cultural division in the election.

Kosachev blamed the notion of Russia’s influence operations on American policymakers using it for political gain.

“The people who keep afloat this theory of conspiracy against the American democracy think that it is better for them to work in a unilateral key, using a monologue and unfounded accusations against Russia,” Kosachev said, according to Russia’s state-run RT news service.

“They use the anti-Russian campaign purely for internal American purposes, the

interests of the same elections campaign they are charging us with meddling in,” Kosachev said.

Paul was one of the few American lawmakers to stick up for President Donald Trump after he sided with Putin last month at a bilateral summit in Helsinki, Finland, where Putin said Russia did not interfere in the elections.

Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers back in Washington quickly pointed out in tweets and formal statements that Russia is not a friend of the U.S. and that the president should not accept Putin’s word as bond on matters of U.S. national security.

The House and Senate issued a flurry of bills and resolutions and to censure Russia and remind Putin that his aggressive foreign policy actions are intolerable to U.S. lawmakers.

The Senate unfurled a comprehensive sanctions package last week.

Paul, however, has stood by Trump, despite his remarks in Helsinki.

“We all do it,” he said in July about foreign election influence operations. “What we need to do is make sure our electoral process is protected.”

“They’re not going to admit it in the same way we’re not going to admit we were involved in the Ukrainian elections or the Russian elections,” Paul said.

Trump has invited Putin to the White House, a move largely panned by lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Putin said he would be happy to meet Trump in Washington or Moscow, but the White House has since said the meeting will be postponed to 2019.

Source: https://www.heraldandnews.com/rand-paul-invites-russians-to-u-s-as-they-claim/article_5fc866bc-2288-5ab0-9b60-535c2bd845f7.html

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