



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 3, 2017

Washington Post Issues Correction After Getting Hack Story Wrong

On Monday the *Washington Post* [expended 2,000 words](#) in a lengthy correction for errors made in its original 1,500-word article claiming there was a Russian attempt to hack a Vermont utility. It should have left well enough alone.



The correction, offered by one of the original article's two authors, stepped carefully around full admission of the error: "As federal officials investigate suspicious Internet activity found last week on a Vermont utility computer, they are finding evidence that the incident is not linked to any Russian government effort to target or hack the utility, according to experts and officials close to the investigation."

In other words, in its haste to get out a highly toxic article before discovering it was based on error, the *Washington Post* lent its diminishing credibility to a meme that sent various Democrats into a frenzy of recriminations against Russia, scaring large parts of its audience into thinking there's a war on, and attempting to denigrate Donald Trump in the process.

Vermont Democrats, including the governor, a senator, and a member of the House, expressed "alarm" and "outrage" over the alleged "attack," calling Vladimir Putin a "thug" and urging the feds to "vigorously pursue and put an end to this sort of Russian meddling," as Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin so carefully expressed it. U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont called for an end to these hackers "having electronic joy rides" at our expense while U.S. House member Peter Welch had already found the supposed miscreants guilty of "systemic, relentless, predatory" behavior.

The actual facts reveal the non-story. On Friday, an employee at Vermont's Burlington Electric Department was checking his Yahoo account when an alert popped up indicating that his laptop had connected to a suspicious IP address that unnamed "authorities" said was associated in some way to the Russian hacking operation that allegedly had infected the DNC.

The employee reported the spurious and suspicious connection to his superiors and the race was on: Who could get the story out first?

In its correction on Monday, the *Post* said that the connection "is not unique to Burlington Electric," as officials stated that "it is possible that the traffic is benign, since this particular IP address discovered by the employee on his laptop "is not always connected to malicious activity."

The original article took a swing at Donald Trump, calling him out for having "spoken highly of Russian President Vladimir Putin" and for even suggesting that the vaunted U.S. intelligence services might be wrong in claiming that Russians hacked into the DNC. Then the *Post's* correction got in another lick: "The incident comes as President-elect Donald Trump has cast doubt on intelligence officials that the



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Russians conducted a hacking operation designed to help him win the White House.”

The *Post* continued: “Experts also say that because Yahoo’s mail servers are visited by millions of people each day, the fact that a Burlington Electric employee checking [his] email touched off an alert is not an indication that the Russian government was targeting the utility.”

The original article should never have been written. The authors should have bent their efforts at checking the veracity of the Vermont utility hacking story — finding nothing, then spiking the story and moving on to something worthwhile.

But stories published by the *Washington Post*, even as spurious as this one, can’t be unread. The suspicion remains: The Russians did something very bad up in Vermont and The Donald is cozying up to the Kremlin thug who ordered it.

In case the point is missed: This is not news. Not even close. It is the worst form of propaganda promoting a particular viewpoint all dressed up to look like real news. No correction can erase that.

Photo: AP Images

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