

Opinions

# While Trump scandals mount, Chaffetz decides to investigate... a cartoon character



By **Dana Milbank** Opinion writer February 13 at 5:41 PM

Angry Utahans shouted down Rep. Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the House Oversight Committee, at the Republican's recent town hall meeting.

"Do your job!" they chanted, scolding him for refusing to investigate the Trump administration.

In fairness to Chaffetz, he is busy with more pressing matters.

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True, Chaffetz, after his unending probes of the Obama administration and Hillary Clinton, hasn't shown any appetite to examine, say, the Trump administration's ties to Russia or its many conflicts of interest. But the chairman has shown determination to probe, without fear or favor, the threat to America posed by Sid the Science Kid.

The chairman of the powerful panel — the main investigative committee in the House — sent a letter to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention demanding to know why, in an attempt to raise awareness of the Zika virus, "CDC appears poised to make a sole source award to the Jim Henson Company for \$806,000 to feature Sid the Science Kid in an educational program about the virus."

Scandalous!

Sid, for readers not familiar with PBS children's programming, is a preschool cartoon character. Like President Trump, Sid is orange. Unlike Trump, he is highly inquisitive. In each episode, Sid answers questions such as: Why can't he scratch his ear

with his foot the way his dog can? Why does his stomach growl when he makes French toast? Why did his yellow banana turn brown and mushy? In one of my favorite episodes, “The Big Sneeze,” Sid discovers that he needs to wash his hands even if he can’t see germs on them.

Chaffetz was quick to recognize the danger. On Jan. 26, the day after TMZ reported that the CDC was planning a Zika-education partnership with Sid, Chaffetz fired off a letter to acting CDC director Anne Schuchat, demanding a “written explanation” and “communications between CDC and the Jim Henson Company and also PBS.”

Chaffetz’s spokeswoman did not respond to a phone call and an email seeking comment.

This raises the possibility that the probe might expand beyond Sid. Can his teacher, Miss Susie, expect a subpoena? Does the inclusion of PBS in the probe suggest Curious George’s immigration status is in jeopardy? Did Bob the Builder hire undocumented workers? Is Kermit the Frog a dishonest journalist who broadcasts fake news?

Chaffetz, in closing, reminded the CDC that his committee can investigate “any matter” at “any time.”

Yes, it can — which is why it’s so appalling that Chaffetz is focusing on an animated preschooler.

Chaffetz never met a probe he didn’t like during the Obama administration, from Benghazi to the IRS. In September alone, Democrats complain, his committee held five days of “emergency” hearings probing Clinton’s emails and issued 12 subpoenas.

Now, as my Post colleagues have reported, several U.S. officials have confirmed that national security adviser Michael Flynn discussed U.S. sanctions against Russia with the Russian ambassador in the month before the inauguration — contradicting public assurances by Vice President Pence and other administration officials. But Chaffetz has showed no curiosity about that, nor about Russia’s attempts to tilt the election in Trump’s favor, nor about much of anything Trump-related.

Instead, Chaffetz is targeting the head of the Office of Government Ethics for questioning the Trump administration’s conflicts of interest.

Chaffetz thought Clinton’s use of a private email server threatened national security. But over the weekend, Trump proved more brazen: He plotted his response to North Korea’s latest missile test from the main dining area of his Mar-a-Lago Club. Club members posted photos on Facebook of Trump and Japan’s Shinzo Abe discussing the matter and poring over documents in proximity to waiters, club members and guests.

In this open-air situation room, Trump spoke by mobile phone and aides used their cellphone flashlights to illuminate papers — not the textbook way to handle sensitive information. One club member posted photos online of the nuclear “football” and its minder.

Scenes such as this one highlight the need for some adult oversight of the new administration. Its travel ban has been shot down in court. The president has been attacking Nordstrom and reincarnating Frederick Douglass. His press secretary has

been making up what presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway calls “alternative facts,” and counselor Conway has herself been counseled after pitching Ivanka Trump’s fashion line on TV.

Chaffetz did say Conway’s Fox News infomercial was “wrong, wrong, wrong.” Maybe he’ll have a hearing on the matter — once he dispenses with Sid the Science Kid and the rest of the late Henson’s empire. Many unanswered questions remain for Chaffetz to probe:

Does Snuffleupagus really exist?

Are Ernie and Bert just friends?

Is the Count a vampire?

Does Mr. Noodle know how to talk?

What happened to Big Bird’s parents?

And: Can you tell me how to get to Sesame Street?

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