

The master of ‘phantom scandals’ behind Trump’s address to the nation

The president chose John Solomon to run a “task force” to declassify evidence of a conspiracy theory that’s been repeatedly debunked.



John Solomon’s record at The Hill and his own media venture is drawing renewed scrutiny after his White House role. Carson Elm-Picard / MS NOW; Celal Gunes / Anadolu Agency via Getty Images; Mandel Ngan / AFP via Getty Images

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By [Julie Millican](#)

When you look at John Solomon’s background, it is clear why President Donald Trump chose him to run a “[task force](#)” to declassify evidence of a conspiracy theory that’s been repeatedly debunked. It is also clear that Solomon’s role will likely end with a web of selectively released documents meant to support the president’s preferred narrative — including election denial claims that he reportedly plans to push in his speech to the nation Thursday.

While Solomon spent a good portion of his career hiding under the veneer of mainstream credibility — with bylines at The Washington Post and The Associated Press, as well as roles at outlets including The Hill, Fox News and the Center for Public Integrity — there had been warning signs about his true leanings. A 2004 AP report he wrote on Democratic presidential

candidate John Kerry [was described](#) by the Columbia Journalism Review as having “a strong resemblance to an RNC press release.” A 2007 story for the Post, about Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards, [was criticized](#) by the paper’s ombudsman as “accurate” but misleading and “controversial even in the Post newsroom.” (The ombudsman said it was “like a ‘gotcha’ without the gotcha.”) A 2012 Columbia Journalism Review profile [similarly noted](#) that “Solomon has a history of bending the truth to his storyline” and that he “was notorious for massaging facts to conjure phantom scandals.”

Solomon became a regular on Hannity’s primetime show, with his reporting serving as part of the foundation for this alternative reality.

Creating “phantom scandals” has made Solomon a key element of the right-wing media’s propaganda machine. He [gained prominence](#) for his quest to discredit Robert Mueller’s Russia investigation during Trump’s first administration — first while working for Sinclair Broadcast Group’s Circa News, and later after becoming executive vice president of digital video at The Hill. Many of the “phantom scandals” Solomon pursued served to [rewrite history](#) by claiming that it was really Democrats with corrupt relationships with Russia who worked to undermine Trump in the 2016 presidential election — not the other way around.

Fox News’ Sean Hannity — a prominent Trump confidant and ally — worked overtime to [spin a counternarrative](#) to the charges of Russian interference in the 2016 election on Trump’s behalf, and Solomon became a regular on Hannity’s primetime show, with his reporting serving as part of the foundation for this alternate reality.

Enter Rudy Giuliani.

As the [House Democrats’ impeachment reports found](#), Solomon was one of the most critical figures in Trump and Giuliani’s plot to extort the Ukrainian government into meddling in the 2020 U.S. election on Trump’s behalf. As I [laid out](#) at the time, Giuliani, then Trump’s personal attorney, [worked with con men](#) and Trump cronies to pursue an “investigation” into Ukraine that he said showed both Ukrainian collusion with Democrats in 2016 and evidence that then-Vice President Joe Biden acted corruptly in Ukraine to benefit his son. In March 2019, Giuliani [sent the results](#) of his investigation to the State Department — and to Solomon. The same month, Solomon began publishing dozens of columns that mirrored the sourcing and claims Giuliani made in his State Department dossier.



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Over the next few months, Solomon [appeared on Fox News or Fox Business](#) at least 72 times. Fifty-one of those appearances were on “Hannity,” the host of which dutifully promoted Solomon’s scoops and wove them into his ever-evolving conspiracy theory that “deep state” elements in the government had been plotting to overthrow Trump.

Ultimately, Solomon [landed a job](#) at Fox News in addition to [starting](#) his own media firm, while Trump had his infamous [“perfect” phone call](#) with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that led to his [first impeachment](#). Solomon’s work featured prominently during Trump’s impeachment inquiry. The probe did not interview Solomon, but [multiple witnesses](#) testified that Solomon’s reporting was inaccurate — including one witness [who described it](#) as full of “non-truths and non sequiturs.”

It also turned out that Solomon was working [hand in hand](#) not just with Giuliani, but also with Giuliani’s associates Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman. He also worked with the husband-and-wife legal duo (and Trump allies) Joseph diGenova and Victoria Toensing, who had Parnas [on their payroll](#), represented a key source and also happened to be Solomon’s personal attorneys — a fact Solomon [did not disclose](#) until seven months into his reporting.

Solomon’s media footprint has expanded with a podcast, a show on Real America’s Voice and regular appearances on right-wing media, in particular on Steve Bannon’s “War Room.”

As this scheme unfolded, [Solomon left The Hill](#) to form his own media company, ironically named Just the News. The Hill, on the other hand, launched an investigation into his work, [found major flaws](#) and added disclosures, context and editor’s notes to his Ukraine columns. For his part, Solomon has long defended his work.

In the years since, Solomon’s media footprint has expanded with a podcast, [a show](#) on Real America’s Voice and regular appearances on right-wing media, in particular on Steve Bannon’s “War Room.” His role as a right-wing media propagandist and Trump defender has solidified, and the line between his role as a journalist and a Trump official has blurred. After the FBI searched Mar-a-Lago in 2022 for classified documents Trump allegedly withheld upon leaving office, Trump [curiously appointed](#) Solomon and Kash Patel (now the FBI director) as his official representatives to the National Archives and Records Administration.

Solomon [has also](#) advanced [election denial conspiracy theories](#), which have recently fixated on China. Since March, he has [repeatedly claimed](#) that the 2020 election was not secure because China allegedly accessed voter registration data in multiple states. In Solomon’s telling, the Democrats and the so-called deep state [hid this information](#) from [the public](#), while China tried to [submit fake ballots](#) on Biden’s behalf. (The United States National Intelligence Council, the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, however, [all concluded](#) that there was no evidence of foreign interference in the 2020 election.)



[Why Americans should be skeptical of Trump's primetime speech on election issues](#) July 16, 2026 / 05:20

In June, [Trump appointed Solomon](#) a “special government employee” to run a “task force” related to declassifying documents about the 2020 election. Around the same time, Trump nominated Bill Pulte — who Solomon has said he knows [“pretty well”](#) — to become acting director of national intelligence.

Solomon is now in a position to potentially create a “phantom scandal” directly from the White House, and right-wing media figures like Bannon have [suggested](#) such a narrative could be a “predicate” for Trump to declare a national emergency over election security ahead of the midterms.

As my colleague John Knefel [reported](#):

The details of the scheme remain publicly vague, and may not yet come to pass, but the short version looks something like this: First, the White House would declassify and release documents purporting to show foreign interference in U.S. elections, especially by the Chinese Communist Party.

Next, Trump would use that supposed “proof” of a stolen election to declare a national emergency, thereby — according to those pushing this idea — giving him extraordinary powers over the upcoming midterms. That move would serve as a way to advance the anti-voting rights measures in the SAVE America Act, like forcing voters to prove their citizenship, without having to actually pass the law — which Congress, so far at least, appears reluctant to do.

Earlier reporting from [MS NOW](#) that Trump’s speech on Thursday would “focus on voting machine security and alleged efforts by foreign nations to influence U.S. elections” suggests that some administration officials are sounding the alarm:

Access to the president has “loosened” in recent months, according to one administration official, as Trump has increasingly leaned on aides and senior officials willing to spread conspiracy theories about 2020.

“It’s that network [of people] that is the real f***ing problem,” said the administration official, who, like others who spoke with MS NOW for this story, was granted anonymity given the sensitivity of the issue. “They try to put bits and pieces together and then make these conclusions. Everything I have seen, it’s not what’s there.”

But no matter what Trump hopes to accomplish with his primetime address, one thing is certain: Intelligence being cherry-picked by a man with a background like Solomon's should never be taken at face value.