

DECLASSIFIED MLK RECORDS: WHAT THEY REVEAL AND WHY THEY MATTER

HEARING

BEFORE THE

TASK FORCE ON THE DECLASSIFICATION
OF FEDERAL SECRETS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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DECLASSIFIED MLK RECORDS: WHAT THEY REVEAL AND WHY THEY MATTER

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2026

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
TASK FORCE ON THE DECLASSIFICATION OF FEDERAL SECRETS
*Washington, D.C.***

The Task Force met, pursuant to notice, at 10:12 a.m., Room HVC-210, U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, Hon. Anna Luna, [Chairwoman of the Task Force] presiding.

Present: Representatives Luna, Mace, Burchett, Burlison, Crockett, and Lee.

Also present: Representative Tlaib .

Mrs. LUNA. The Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets will come to order.

Welcome, everyone. Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time. I recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN ANNA PAULINA LUNA REPRESENTATIVE FROM FLORIDA

On Thursday, April 4, 1968, America was forever changed when Dr. Martin Luther King was tragically assassinated on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. King's murder was an immense tragedy for the Nation, the civil rights movement, as well as the King family. Over time, it has become increasingly clear that our Federal Government was not honest about this investigation regarding the tragedy or its abuses leading up to it. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the FBI waged an extensive campaign of surveillance, intimidation, and harassment against Dr. King. They wiretapped his phones, bugged his hotel rooms, and paid informants to spy on him.

The Task Force is gathered here today to examine the benefits of declassification and how disclosure can start to rebuild trust in this Federal Government and avoid these horrendous abuses from ever happening again. President Trump's executive order directing agencies to release extensive files on Dr. King was the right thing to do. It is the job of this Task Force to ensure that Federal agencies comply with the executive order.

Even now, records remain outstanding, including those covered in the highly anticipated 1977 settlement requiring the FBI to release its records in 2027. It is, however, important to note that

those wiretaps were illegally obtained and meant to smear Dr. King.

I want to make it clear that we are not here to speculate without facts. We are here to seek the truth. Declassification is not about politics. It is about justice and transparency. It is also about ensuring the American people finally receive the full story behind one of the most consequential and tragic events in our Nation's history. For too long, that truth has remained sealed. It is long past time to confront our history honestly so that we can begin rebuilding the public's faith in an institution meant to serve them.

Mrs. LUNA. And with that, I yield to Ranking Member Crockett for her opening statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER
JASMINE CROCKETT, REPRESENTATIVE FROM TEXAS**

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

And it is a bit surreal for me to sit here as someone who attended college in Memphis, Tennessee, and is a civil rights lawyer and now has the privilege of serving in Congress, mostly because of the activism of not only Dr. King but all of those involved in the civil rights movement. And to serve as the Ranking Member, nevertheless, when I know that literally it was he, along with others, that fought for the Voting Rights Act to be signed into law, as well as the Civil Rights Act to be signed into law.

At the same time, I cannot help but to feel a bit conflicted at the moment in which we are in right now, where it seems like a lot of that work is being rolled back. But nevertheless, I am so grateful to the Chairwoman for making sure that we could dig into this because if we do not understand the errors of our past, then we are doomed to repeat them.

This past weekend, we celebrated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a life dedicated to fighting for civil liberties and economic opportunity through nonviolent resistance, a legacy built on demanding institutions to uphold the promises laid out in our Constitution and an impact continued by his living children.

One year ago, President Trump signed Executive Order 14176, which ordered the release and declassification of documents regarding the assassinations of former President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert F. Kennedy, and Dr. King. This order and the subsequent release of roughly 250,000 pages pertaining to Dr. King's assassination were done in the name of transparency and strong public interest.

Yet when it comes to the crimes that have not been brought to justice or the victims and families that have not had their day in court, this administration has lied to the American people, disregarded subpoenas and discharged petitions like they are mere suggestions, and continues to trample over transparency, despite incredibly strong public interest, both domestically and internationally.

Dr. King's assassin was held accountable for his crimes, but I am sure we all know of a group of individuals who have not been afforded that same justice. The hundreds of victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking at the hands of Epstein, Maxwell, and countless others we have no knowledge of due to this administra-

tion's withholding of the files. And I must say that the Chairwoman has also been very strong on these issues, so I just want to be clear on that.

How can we engage in a serious conversation about what the American people ought to know when there are predators and there are enablers that continue to walk free and potentially perpetrate those same crimes? We simply cannot in good faith, but this administration does not know good faith. This administration knows distraction, destruction, and deals all for the benefit and protection of the President and his billionaire buddies.

We know that no new information regarding King's assassination was uncovered following the release of the declassified documents. But released documents pertaining to the FBI and CIA's investigation of King highlight the weaponization of the FBI to undermine King's efforts and tarnish his image, something this administration knows all too well, whether it be weaponizing the DOJ to go after Jack Smith for his January 6 investigation or the directing of the FBI to investigate Ms. Becca Good following her wife Renee Good's murder at the hands of an ICE agent. This administration's actions today are reminiscent of Hoover's FBI that worked so diligently to ensure that equality and justice for all would not become a reality.

Trump's 2025 release of the declassified MLK documents also circumvents a 1977 order by Judge John L. Smith to seal the records for 50 years, which would release them in 2027. Releasing the documents two years ahead of their schedule order is another example of this administration's laundry list of ignoring the law and its pattern of slashing through protocols that protect our national security and intelligence.

Today's hearing and the continued actions of the administration undermine the work Dr. King dedicated his life to, while also reminding us how the Trump Administration and Republicans, to quote Dr. King himself, "are more concerned about the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity."

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mrs. LUNA. I ask for unanimous consent for Representative Mfume of Maryland to be waived onto the Task Force for today's hearing for the purpose of asking questions.

Ms. CROCKETT. No objection.

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection, so ordered.

I am pleased to welcome the panel of witnesses here today. I would like to first welcome Dr. Alveda King, who happens to have her birthday today, so happy birthday, ma'am.

Dr. KING. [Off mic.]

Mrs. LUNA. Oh, just real quick, how old are you turning again?

Ms. CROCKETT. Oh, no, you did not.

Mrs. LUNA. Yes, yes, no, she was telling—you said 70—75.

Ms. CROCKETT. You are going to put that on the record?

Mrs. LUNA. Happy 75th birthday, ma'am. We are very happy to have you here today.

Dr. King is the niece of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. She is a former college professor, previously served in the Georgia State House, and is a former Presidential appointee. Dr. King currently serves as the Chair of the American Dream at the America First Policy Institute.

Mr. Stuart Wexler is an investigative researcher and author who has cowritten two books on the Dr. King assassination.

And Mr. Kia Hamadanchy is a senior Federal policy counsel at ACLU. He is a former House and Senate staffer and went to work at the Peace Street Project and the congressional Progressive Caucus Center.

Pursuant to the Committee rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise your right hand.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative. Thank you. You may take your seats.

We appreciate you being here today and look forward to your testimonies.

Let me remind the witnesses that we have all read your written statement, and it will also appear in full in the hearing record. Please limit your oral responses to 5 minutes, but if it goes over, it is okay.

As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you so that it is on and that the Members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green, and after 4 minutes, the light will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your 5 minutes has expired, and we would ask you to please wrap up.

I now recognize Dr. King for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT DR. ALVEDA KING, CHAIR, AMERICAN DREAM
AMERICA FIRST POLICY INSTITUTE**

Dr. KING. Thank you. Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and Members of this honorable Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today. I am grateful for your service to our Nation and for your willingness to engage in this important and solemn work.

I am Dr. Alveda Celeste King. I come before you today not only as a policy leader, as a daughter, a niece, a granddaughter, a mother, a grandmother, and a woman of faith. I wish to begin by expressing sincere appreciation to President Donald J. Trump. My mother's last message to him—and my mother was a very devoted Democrat, but she was so blessed when President Trump signed our home that had been bombed in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, and she thanked him for putting the home of her husband and our family on the registry when he signed that, and it is on the cover of one of our books.

Attorney General Pam Bondi and Director Tulsi Gabbard for their commitment to transparency and openness in government. The release of the files related to the assassination of my uncle, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., represents a meaningful and historic step toward faith and truth and justice. Especially difficult truth has a way of getting and setting us free. Transparency invites trust, and trust is essential for national hearing—healing.

This moment—I am very emotional because it triggers many memories as I am speaking to you today. Please excuse me. This moment is deeply personal for me and my family. My uncle, Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was first and foremost a preacher of the gospel. Before he was the global civil rights leader, he was guided by faith, prayer, and family as a husband, a father, an uncle, a servant of God. He believed with all his heart that we are one blood, one human race, created by God and called to love one another, even when that love is costly.

My father, the Reverend A.D. King, was a pastor and civil rights leader who stood faithfully beside his brother in the civil rights movement. Daddy, too, preached nonviolence, reconciliation, and courage rooted in faith.

My grandfather, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr., or Daddy King, as we called him, raised our family in the church and taught us that righteousness, justice, humility, and perseverance must guide our public lives as well as our private ones.

As we have reviewed these newly released records, we are reminded that the civil rights era was marked not only by moral courage but also by deep concern, misunderstanding, and mistrust. There were moments when institutions failed to live up to their highest calling. Instead of protecting voices calling for justice and for peace, actions were taken that caused pain, confusion, and heartbreak for my family and for many others who labored peacefully for equal rights. I say this not in anger but in honesty and with sincere grace from God.

We cannot heal what we refuse to acknowledge, and yet we must approach the truth with humility and forgiveness, remembering that our goal is not condemnation but rather restoration and healing. My uncle taught us that love must be the center of every pursuit of justice. Nonviolence was not merely a tactic for him. It was a way of life. He reminded us that hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that. Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. In a time when our Nation feels deeply divided, I believe this moment offers an invitation to unity, to prayer, and to a renewed commitment to the ideals that bind us together. I pray that the work of this Committee will help lead our Nation forward in wisdom, humility, and peace.

Thank you for allowing me to share my heart today. I look forward to your questions.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you, Dr. King.

I now recognize Mr. Wexler for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MR. STUART WEXLER AUTHOR AND INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCHER

Mr. WEXLER. Greetings, Chairwoman Luna, Ranking Member Crockett. Do I need to—

Mrs. LUNA. Yes, press the button, please.

Mr. WEXLER. Greetings, Chairwoman Luna, Ranking Member Crockett. Thank you—and everyone else on the Task Force. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk to you folks today.

My focus is going to be on material that we can obtain, but I want to say that the material that you already have released, which is something like 245,000 pages, is already a major contribution to scholarship, to investigations, to the public in trying to understand what happened. I will talk a little bit about what is in

that material. Most of my time is going to be pleading with you folks to release some more.

The main focus of what I am going to be talking about—and I will go into some depth and in questions—is my hope that you will release the sealed material, sealed by this body, by the House of Representatives. This is incredibly important. You are the folks who can release it. Executive order cannot release it. To release the materials from the House Select Committee on Assassinations—I am going to call it the HSCA a lot as we move forward—that was sealed not by a judge, this was sealed by the Clerk of the House of Representatives. But it can be unsealed—it is a misperception; I will talk about it—at the discretion of that Clerk. I am going to actually ask you folks to do that and to do it selectively, and that might be a little bit controversial, but I will explain why.

So, a little bit about me, I have been researching all three assassinations for—since I was 12. I am about to be 50 in a couple of weeks. I grew up in a RFK, MLK, JFK family. I have authored two books on Martin Luther King's assassination. I believe Martin Luther King was one of the greatest moral leaders of our time, possibly of any time, and in fact, I think he was killed in large part by people who wanted to divide our country against each other and have us engage in basically a genocidal civil war because, crazily enough, they think that somehow from those ashes, something good would come.

And for two weeks after Dr. King was killed, when our country descended into the worst domestic unrest that we experienced since the Civil War and Reconstruction, some of those people might have been licking their lips, but they failed. And I would like to actually take this opportunity, if the King family is watching, to extend it to them, but to Ms. King, to thank their family. They do not get enough credit for what they did after his assassination to calm the tensions in this country when we were at each other's throats.

I mentioned that I come from a JFK, MLK, RFK family. My father and my grandparents were at the March on Washington in 1963. Five years later, on April 5, in the chaos in the school in which my father taught, he was knocked to the ground. A student had a chair and was ready to hit him in the head, but he paused and he put the chair down. And my father was convinced that it is because that student thought about the example not only Dr. King but the message and the example that his family was offering to the country at the time. And it might be presumptuous of me, definitely going to do it on behalf of my late father, but to do it on behalf of the country. I do not know if anybody's ever thanked you folks for that, but amongst the many things that you should be thankful—thanked for, that is one of them.

Now, I would love to reframe the focus of this Committee not to the legacy necessarily specifically of Dr. King but to focus it on very specifically what the executive order that Donald Trump's put into effect I think almost a year ago to this day, and that is releasing files very specifically related to his assassination. There is a misconception that the material that was released in June was derogatory material toward Martin Luther King. No, your Committee and the archives actually did an amazing job of focusing the mate-

rial that was released on his actual murder and the investigation of his murder.

The material that was released was something called the MURKIN files. That is an abbreviation the FBI gave it. It is murder of Martin Luther King. Every single field office in the United States was involved in the investigation of the murder that happened afterwards, and you folks got—released virtually every single one of those files, including headquarters files. There is a handful I could talk about it that need to be put in, but almost all of them were released.

There is almost nothing in there—I can see—I have never seen—I have been researching this for 20 years. In the MURKIN material, you do not find the kind of salacious stuff that J. Edgar Hoover was quite deliberately collecting to try and smear Dr. King. And frankly—and this is a point I want to make. I am actually kind of glad it does not because if you know anything—and I am going to probably ask questions about this—that material is unvetted material, so it is not necessarily good stuff.

But what you can do—and I am running out of time—there is still one major body of evidence that needs to be released. It is the House Select Committee on Assassinations files on Martin Luther King's assassination. Nearly every single page of the concurrent investigation into the JFK assassination has been released. Zero has been released on the Martin Luther King assassination.

Mrs. LUNA. Mr. Wexler, we are a minute over and we have to run to votes real quick, so we will continue to ask you those, but we are going to move on to our next witness—

Mr. WEXLER. Certainly.

Mrs. LUNA [continuing]. Mr. Hamadanchy.

**STATEMENT OF MR. KIA HAMADANCHY (MINORITY WITNESS)
SENIOR POLICY COUNSEL
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION**

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Chairwoman Luna, Ranking Member Crockett, and Members of this Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union about the release of files related to the legal surveillance of Dr. Martin Luther King and broader issues of government surveillance.

The surveillance of Dr. Martin Luther King represents one of the darkest abuses of government power in the history of our country. Under the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), Dr. King was subjected to extensive warrantless surveillance that violated both his constitutional rights and the fundamental principles of a free society. The FBI's campaign against Dr. King had no connection to any legitimate national security concerns or law enforcement purpose. The FBI wiretapped Dr. King's phones, bugged his hotel rooms, monitored his associates, and attempted to destroy his reputation. It remains one of the most shameful episodes in FBI history. The surveillance was warrantless, it was illegal, and it was wrong.

This experience helps show how surveillance powers that the government can ostensibly claim for legitimate purposes can easily be weaponized against whichever groups the government views as threatening at any given moment, whether civil rights activists in

the 1960s, antiwar protesters in the 1970s, or Muslim Americans after 9/11.

In 1975, the Senate established the Church Committee, which remains the gold standard for congressional oversight. Their investigation uncovered COINTELPRO, the FBI's program under J. Edgar Hoover to infiltrate and disrupt civil rights and antiwar movements. Few members of any of the groups targeted by COINTELPRO were ever charged with a crime.

Operation CHAOS, the CIA's domestic surveillance of antiwar protesters, political dissidents, and civil rights activists, and Project SHAMROCK, a National Security Agency (NSA) program that collected the contents of private telegrams and communications without warrant or judicial approval. The Committee's work led to the creation of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA. Over time, however, these achievements eroded as the oversight framework established in the 1970s has proved ill-equipped to handle the modern era.

In recent decades, under Presidents of both parties, we have seen a massive expansion of the government's surveillance apparatus in ways that threaten our rights, allowing the government access to vast amounts of personal information and communications, often without warrants or the kind of robust self-safeguards needed to protect individual privacy and constitutional rights. And the concerns regarding these programs from Congress have been bipartisan, including legislation introduced by the Chairwoman of this Committee to repeal the Patriot Act.

On April 20, section 702 of FISA is scheduled to expire. While intended for foreign targets, section 702 sweeps up vast quantities of American communications without a warrant. The FBI then searches these data bases for Americans' information, a backdoor search that bypasses the protections of the Fourth Amendment. And section 702 has been abused under Presidents of both political parties and has been used to unlawfully query the communications of individuals and groups across the political spectrum. These include searches of Members of Congress and their donors, journalists and political activists, more than 141 individuals protesting the murder of George Floyd, and over 20,000 individuals associated with the events of January 6.

In recent years, we have also seen the ever-growing practice of law enforcement intelligence agencies circumventing constitutional protections by purchasing access to data they would otherwise need a warrant to obtain, including location and internet search records. This is allowed to occur because of gaps in the law, and the Fourth Amendment Is Not For Sale Act, which passed the House of Representatives with bipartisan support last Congress, including from the Chairwoman and Ranking Member of this Task Force, would have closed this dangerous loophole.

More recently, National Security Presidential Memorandum 7, or NSPM 7, has directed Federal departments and law enforcement agencies to focus existing authorities to investigate and disrupt civil society groups and nonprofits under false labels of domestic terrorism. This strategy of investigating and disrupting networks mirrors the exact abuses uncovered by the Church Committee. It

uses categories subject to political, ideological, and racial bias to paint ordinary Americans as threats.

Simultaneously, the Department of Homeland Security has expanded its surveillance infrastructure through facial recognition apps like Mobile Fortify, the use of spyware technology, expanded use of StingRay technology, and nationwide networks of automated license plate readers.

The question before this Task Force and Congress is whether we will continue down our current path or whether we can change course and conduct the kind of comprehensive investigation that the current surveillance State demands. A new Church Committee tasked with investigating the exercise and abuse of executive power would represent the first comprehensive review of Presidential authority in half a century. And the only sustainable approach is principled oversight that constrains executive power and related surveillance authorities, regardless of who holds the office of the Presidency.

As Senator Frank Church himself warned, the capability at any time could be turned around on the American people, and no American would have any privacy left, such as the capability to monitor everything. Telephone conversations, telegrams, it does not matter, there would be no place to hide.

Thank you for your attention, and I welcome your questions.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you.

Pursuant to the previous order, the Chair now declares the Task Force in recess, subject to the call of the Chair. We will plan to reconvene immediately after Floor votes.

And this Committee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

Mrs. LUNA. The Committee will come to order. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Wexler, if you could, over time, do you think that there is some way to inform the American people about the COINTELPRO type of activities more in depth without giving unwarranted support for the kind of dirty tricks, unvetted smut, et cetera, that none of us should have to hear about people we respect, especially when it might not be true?

Mr. WEXLER. I think there is definitely a way. I think the way you do it is you delineate between process and substance, and I use substance very loosely. So, if you want to say, release information that says, in a file, right? On X day, this agent planted this device in so-and-so's hotel room at 5:48 in violation or contradiction to orders from the Attorney General's Office. The public should get to see something like that.

But right afterwards, you are going to probably have a whole bunch of information that was obtained from what was almost definitely—if you know anything about how the FBI surveillance worked at that time—a grainy microphone in a closed room that is interpreted by biased people who are out to smear the people they are interpreting. Their bosses are on their case to give them material that they can leak to the media to smear somebody.

I would redact that stuff. You can tell me about the process without giving me stuff that, as I could probably get to in later points in time, I know of examples where they have had obviously false

information that it snowballed into even worse false information, and it is in the files. And we do not have people who are alive now who can even tell you that it is false. And so that is my worry, that it is going to be just continuing Hoover's dirty work for him.

Mrs. LUNA. So, you would consider that, with interpretation, as basically like planted information with the intent to smear reputation?

Mr. WEXLER. And not just planted. I mean, he is—it is not like Hoover was discerning. If somebody went to him with really bad information, the worse information it was, the happier he'd be to put it in a file and then go over to some Congressperson's office and say, hey, look at what I learned about Martin Luther King or John Lennon or President Kennedy. He was terrible with that. So, yes, that is—I would agree with that.

Mrs. LUNA. And can you remind us again what were the MURKIN files and what was the MURKIN investigation?

Mr. WEXLER. So, MURKIN—the FBI likes to abbreviate their investigation. So, like the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church is called BAPBOMB. MURKIN is the FBI shorthand for the murder of Martin Luther King. It was the investigation that emanated right after April 4. It was all 55 field offices in the country, multiple field offices overseas, central headquarters. They were all in what was large—one of the largest manhunts, one of the largest investigations in FBI history, dedicated to try and investigate the crime. And what is so good about what is released is that material, even when it is, you know, silly leads, it is all about the crime. It is not about trying to smear Dr. King.

Mrs. LUNA. Dr. King, I know that you had spoken earlier—and thank you for being here again today—about the impact that this had on your family specifically. But when Dr. King was going through all this—I know with some of the files that have come out, we know that the FBI was suggesting that he kill himself and was using a smear operation, even going as far as sending information to his wife. But you being, you know, a little girl at the time, do you specifically remember—can you speak to what you remember and how that impacted your family from a personal perspective?

Dr. KING. I can certainly definitely—

Mrs. LUNA. Ma'am, please turn on your microphone so we can hear you.

Dr. KING. I certainly do remember. I have had 75 years of these experiences. So, I was born in 1951. Around 1956 or so, my uncle, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., my father, Reverend Alfred Daniel Williams King, they were brothers, they were preachers together, young fathers, family men together. So, very loosely, we and my own family experienced what we call wiretaps. And their excuse for taping or tapping all of us, Uncle M.L. and Daddy, they were brothers. They were in and out of each other's houses, shared each other's telephones. So, there ended up being files not only on Martin Luther King but our whole family. And you could—in those days, the wires would crackle, and you could hear the wiretaps, and we would know that somebody was listening.

I do not know if you can imagine this, but I was a young girl, 1963, I was 12, "I have a dream" speech. I grew up, had little boy-friends and things, and got married the year after Martin Luther

King, Jr., was killed. So, I became an adult, young woman. And so, my own little private conversations were being listened to under the excuse of, we have got to hear what Martin Luther King, Jr., is doing. So, this is not secondhand information for me. It happened to our whole family.

Mrs. LUNA. Mr. Hamadanchy, can you maybe speak to, there was this intentional smear and, I think, excuse that Dr. King was a communist. Can you speak to why he was branded as such and how that might tie into what the NSA was doing with the illegal surveillance of Dr. King?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Yes, I mean, I think that they—it was an attack on the civil rights movement. And they were looking for justification to try to illegally wiretap Dr. King. And so obviously, we were in an era in this country where being a communist was seen as being something who was a threat to national security.

And this is the sort of thing we see where people violate the constitutional rights of Americans, often with the idea of there is a foreign intelligence purpose. And these are obviously—these end up being defined fairly broadly, so pretty much everything becomes a foreign intelligence purpose. And many of the abuses we saw of Dr. King and other civil rights leaders were along these lines, basically saying, oh, these people are communists, so we can do whatever we want.

Mrs. LUNA. I now recognize Ranking Member Jasmine Crockett.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The FBI and CIA illegally tapped phone conversations, as Dr. King has laid out, bugged hotel rooms, and deployed informants to build a case against Dr. King. As the de facto leader of the civil rights movement, Dr. King became a threat to the status quo, leading him to become the target of illegal surveillance, which the released declassified documents further highlighted. The justification for this illegal surveillance, Dr. King was an anti-American for fighting to see the ideals enshrined in the Constitution become a reality for all.

So, Mr. Hamadanchy, do you believe Dr. King's actions warranted government surveillance?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Absolutely not. There was no justification, no national security justification, no law enforcement purpose, so no.

Ms. CROCKETT. It is almost as if the FBI should have used its time and resources to investigate the countless threats on Dr. King's life rather than attempting to discredit a man working to fulfill the very tenets the agency claims to defend. Today's political landscape proves that Dr. King's efforts are just as needed as they were during his lifetime.

From day one, Trump has rolled back Federal protections of civil liberties, destroyed the institutional integrity of our Federal Government, and wielded law enforcement to do his personal bidding. The Trump Administration is quick to deem individuals from private citizens to elected officials as anti-American. Their alleged crime? Daring to stand up and speak out against this administration's illegal actions.

But you know what is anti-American? It is anti-American to deport individuals without due process. It is anti-American to strip

thousands of their birthright citizenship. It is anti-American to attack your enemies and send the DOJ after them.

So, again, I ask you, Mr. Hamadanchy, would you agree the current administration is similarly weaponizing the government against private citizens as it was done to Dr. King? And if so, how?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Yes, I mean, I think we have seen unprecedented abuses of executive authority under the current administration. And part of the problem is, in the aftermath of the surveillance of Dr. King, we saw a lot of reforms after the Church Committee. And those reforms have broken down. And we have seen a vast expansion of executive authority under Presidents of both parties that this administration has now taken and supercharged in a way that we have not seen for a very long time.

Ms. CROCKETT. Today, we are supposed to be voting on a bill as it relates to ICE specifically. And there are reports that ICE is now just monitoring random citizens with no warrants, no nothing, just monitoring. You would agree with me that that is similar to the actions that were taken by the Federal Government as it relates to Dr. King?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Yes, I mean, I think we are seeing tools that ICE is using like facial recognition technology. And when you scan someone with facial recognition technology, you do not know if that person is in America or not, so it is absolutely being used on U.S. citizens.

And the second thing is, these sorts of technologies end up not being cabined within one particular law enforcement agency. ICE is using it today, but tomorrow, there is going to be other law enforcement agencies using it against Americans in ways that Members of both parties would probably disagree with.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you. Exactly. This administration is pulling from the tired old playbook of bigotry, trying to undo the work that has been done in the name of civil rights and economic advancement. Prices are higher. Housing is unaffordable. You could be illegally detained as an American citizen, or worse, murdered for standing up to an administration hellbent on ripping away the humanity and dignity of our neighbors.

And since I have extra time, which I never have, you know, listen, I am so afraid for our country right now. And it is because I have never been one of those people that has said we should not teach Black history. We should teach Black history. Black history is American history. We should know the real stories. And I think that is why declassification matters. We should know what the Federal Government was doing as it relates to someone who was so integral to making sure that civil rights became a reality not just for Black Americans. Everybody benefited from civil rights being passed. And so, it is so counterintuitive that this administration, on one hand, is like, let us declassify, while at the same time, they are doing the very same things, if not more.

I mean, the idea that—and I do not know if we are aware of how much of this was going on, but we know that in the Jim Crow South, that there were things that people had to worry about such as law enforcement using the water hoses and using the dogs on people that were simply trying to exercise their constitutional rights. Is that correct, Mr. Hamadanchy?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. I think there were definitely lots of abuses, like you said, at that time.

Ms. CROCKETT. Yes. And sadly enough, it seems like instead of us moving forward, we are only moving backward. So, hopefully, declassifying this, hopefully, we can take this as an opportunity to learn from what actually caused harm in our country because I appreciate what Mr. Wexler said about actually bringing people together in the aftermath and the work that the King family did. I am calling on our country to become unified because right now, the hate is destroying us.

Again, as we just celebrated MLK Day, the best thing that we can do to honor MLK is to see the humanity in our fellow citizens, as well as those that are immigrants and actually decide that we are going to be on the side of humanity. So, thank you.

And with that, I will yield.

Mrs. LUNA. I ask unanimous consent for Representative Tlaib of Michigan to be waived onto the Task Force for today's hearing for the purpose of asking questions.

Ms. CROCKETT. No objection.

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize Representative Lee for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. I was not expecting that, but thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I think the thing that we need to remember during this hearing is that these files would not even exist if the Federal Government had not abused its surveillance powers and gone after private citizens like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The FBI ruthlessly and persistently surveilled Dr. King and his family, even in their own home and without any kind of warrant. It is only thanks to the work of journalists and government investigators of the 1960s and the 1970s that we know that the FBI weaponized its COINTELPRO program to spy on, to harass, and to intimidate Dr. King and many other civil rights leaders and figures. In 1976, the Senate Church Committee found that the FBI used COINTELPRO to go after civil rights groups who were fighting for integration and enfranchisement.

Mr. Hamadanchy, the FBI did not just surveil and collect information, did they? Can you tell us how the FBI weaponized this information against Dr. King and other civil rights leaders?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. They were trying to politically smear these leaders because they were trying to discredit the civil rights movement. And so, they were trying to create accusations against them that would do that. And the most important thing to note that pretty much anyone that was surveilled in COINTELPRO was never actually charged with a crime.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. And did these types of tactics stop after the Church Committee's findings?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. The Church Committee findings were, at the time, pretty groundbreaking, and the reforms that we put into place did work in the aftermath. But that was 50 years ago, and things have changed a lot like that, and those oversight structures are no longer good.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. In fact, there are even more ways that the Federal Government can exploit laws now to surveil private citi-

zens. Post 9/11, of course, a number of new laws gave the government a whole slew of tools to do the same thing in the name of national security. We saw these tactics used against Black Lives Matter protesters. We saw them used against student protesters supporting a cease-fire in Gaza. Now we are seeing it used against anti-ICE protesters.

The Federal Government is also using AI and spyware to better surveil private citizens, which is why I demanded answers from Secretary Noem on ICE's contract with a spyware company whose surveillance product has the ability to access people's cell phone data without their knowledge or their consent.

The Fourth Amendment protects people in this country from unreasonable searches and seizures. Yet for decades, the Federal Government seems to throw that right out of the window when it is Black or it is Brown people who exercise their First Amendment rights to free speech or peaceable assembly. Time and time again, these movements are portrayed as terrorists, are violent, rioters, or simply anti-or un-American, all to give the Federal Government the excuse that their unlawful actions are in the interests of national security.

So, the Federal Government cannot be allowed to violate people's rights under the cover of darkness. We would not even know about the Federal Government's actions against Dr. King or the COINTELPRO operation if it was not for strong oversight, so we need to continue this important oversight work, which is why, today, Rep. Jonathan Jackson and I are introducing the COINTELPRO Full Disclosure Act. This bill will require the public disclosure of all COINTELPRO records and establish a review board to ensure compliance.

So, Madam Chair, I invite you and, of course, the rest of our colleagues to join me in this effort and I think in an attempt to ensure that there is no government overreach on private citizens. I would love if we could have your support for that.

Mrs. LUNA. I will take a look at it. I do not have any objections.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. We will definitely get that to your team, and we appreciate you looking.

Mrs. LUNA. Okay.

Ms. LEE. And with that, I yield back.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you very much.

I now recognize Representative Tlaib from Michigan for 5 minutes.

Ms. TLAIB. Hi. Thank you all so much for this. You know, I am not on this Committee, and I appreciate the Chairwoman waiving me on because what I witnessed the last two years was very reminiscent of the targeting of Dr. King, and not only spying, but the attack on his moral character. And I know Dr. King here knows what I mean. You know, not only racializing, but using ways to tear him down, to divide the community that has been behind the civil rights movement.

And so, you know, as a Palestinian-American serving in Congress, I am seeing ACLU and others representing folks right now that the government—in expressing their First Amendment, the government targeting people who have expressed their First

Amendment right around boycott, apartheid governments, genocidal governments.

And so, Mr. Hamadanchy, right now, private citizens are being spied on. Is that correct?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Yes, the government, through many different programs, is gathering lots of communications in Americans, and they have accessed that communication without a warrant.

Ms. TLAIB. And have you, in the ACLU, witnessed them also targeting students?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. I would say that we cannot—I cannot point to specific abuses that happen with students, but almost certainly. And one of the things we have actually seen with students in particular is the use of social media monitoring—

Ms. TLAIB. Yes.

Mr. HAMADANCHY [continuing]. So, using algorithmic tools—

Ms. TLAIB. Using technology to—

Mr. HAMADANCHY [continuing]. To actually monitor what they are saying in social media and then acting on that.

Ms. TLAIB. So, what I witnessed is, you know, the targeting by the Federal Government and surveilling the Muslim community in the way they have, targeting people that maybe are of means that have been investing in, you know, organizations that have been trying to end the genocide. They have approached me several times about different ways that the Federal Government has put them on no-fly lists, have targeted them, have, you know, indirectly or directly made accusations, again, in a way that I think, similar to Dr. King, is like discrediting them and making them kind of go silent, right? The fact that Hoover is a dangerous threat, that, you know, Dr. King is this or that so that people can, again, not allow him to be in space and again, tear down his character.

I am seeing that, though, happening to people in my own community that are standing up against, you know, a foreign government, for instance, or against, you know, different form of war crimes and international human rights violations.

And I do not know—Dr. Hamadanchy, I know that you guys just won a case recently. You know this. And most of these students are telling me that it is the university working with the Federal Government and surveilling them and targeting them. And these are not people like Dr. King, who had a movement behind him, right? It still was hard, and Dr. King here, you know, is a witness to that. But these are students that have no access to means, and they are relying on, you know, us Members of Congress to defend their First Amendment right.

But I think it is just important for the American people to know, Dr. King is the one that a lot of people talk about. But just in a few years, in 2024 and 2025, you saw the increase of campuses and organizations working with the Federal Government to use various means to surveil and target and terrorize students.

Mr. HAMADANCHY. I would say, in—particularly in the post-9/11 era, we have seen a vast expansion of programs like the No Fly List, like surveillance—many, many different surveillance programs. And part of that is the overstrike structures that we built into place since the 1970s have completely broken down.

Ms. TLAIB. Do you know for a fact—and I have asked this before—anybody on the No Fly List, anybody on campuses that have been targeted, have they even been charged with a crime?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. It is often the case that someone can be on the No Fly List or could be surveilled by the government without ever being charged with a crime.

Ms. TLAIB. Yes. With that, just for the Chairwoman to know, I can bring in one by one people, businessmen, women who work in the education field, others that have come to my office who continue to be put on the No Fly List, not told why, not even given a process to get reviewed. And again, it has been incredibly painful because they feel like the government is watching them, surveilling them, putting them on a list, and they have no way to defend themselves or to be able to understand why. And I think it is something we should look into. And again, a majority of them are Muslim, but they always start with one community, and they will get to the next, and the next, and the next because they disagree with them politically.

Thank you so much, and I yield.

Mrs. LUNA. I now recognize Representative Burlison from Missouri.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. And thank you, Madam Chair, for your support of transparency. And really, I want to thank our President for his efforts to be the disclosure President.

As many of you know, and the reason why we are here under his executive order, we have had over 240,000 classified documents released. These documents pull back the curtain on the surveillance that was, you know, heavy-handed and toward—and before, leading up to Dr. King's assassination in 1968. And we are talking about wiretaps. We are talking about bugging hotel rooms in trying to get informants within his circle, all run by his own government that they are supposed to be protecting his rights.

Look, at the end of the day, I think they went—what is interesting is the impact maybe still goes on today. And so, I was going to ask the witnesses first and foremost, Mr. Wexler, do you see similarities to what happened at the time that Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated and the heavy hand of the surveillance state? Do you see similarities to what we are facing today?

Mr. WEXLER. So, a lot of what I am here for, particularly, is about Dr. King's assassination. And a lot of those 250,000 files, I have been through them. Almost none of them actually deal with the surveillance on Dr. King. I am well aware of what the surveillance was on Dr. King. I am hoping that we could talk about what can be done to release even more information on his assassination if Congress unseals the records from the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

To your question, Representative Burlison, it is a little bit outside of my area of expertise, but there is no question that technology now has made it infinitely easier not just for the government but for private companies to surveil people, and so it—that is something that definitely concerns me.

Part of what I am trying to do here is to suggest a way forward on the assassination files where we can release the material on

King's assassination that the executive order focuses on, the assassination. Release that material from the House's investigation in the 1970s without reflexively releasing information that, again, I hope I can answer some questions about this——

Mr. BURLISON. Yes, I think what——

Mr. WEXLER [continuing]. Is not even true about Dr. King. Like, that is my big concern is that we are—there is the process of the surveillance, which is a terrible thing that happened——

Mr. BURLISON. But it all seemed to be trying to be trying to point in a direction that really was not the reality, that he was somehow, you know, connected to, or he was a communist in some way or a socialist. And it was all trying to pin that on him. But when you look at the documents that have been released, they seem to indicate that he never had any of those comments or thoughts.

Mr. WEXLER. I mean, again, the documents are almost entirely—the ones—the 250,000 that were released were exactly what President Trump put forward in the executive order, which is almost exclusively about the crime, like who was where, when, what witnesses saw what, you know, what did the analysis of the bullets say. There is not—there is just a small subset that deals with the surveillance, Operation Merrimack, of some of the civil rights and antiwar activities, which people forget Dr. King was associated with, but it is not the salacious stuff.

We know about the salacious stuff from other previous sources, and it is partially why I am worried because, I agree with you, Representative Burlison. A lot of the salacious stuff, we would have no way of ever even verifying if it is true because, unfortunately, a lot of the figures who would be around to even talk about it do not even exist. It was obtained illegally. It was obtained for the very purpose of smearing not just him, but people like you folks in Congress, people in the executive branch, Presidents of the United States. And a lot of it was about trying to create a perception of people, like you said, that was either completely untrue or at least a distortion of the truth. J. Edgar Hoover was not discerning. I would agree with you on that.

Mr. BURLISON. Just looking at this—and I have read some of your testimony that you are kind of trying to draw a line here that there is a way to legitimately release these documents without violating the interest of releasing material that might be harmful to the King family.

Mr. WEXLER. A hundred percent there is.

Mr. BURLISON. And can you explain that, what that is?

Mr. WEXLER. So, the material that I am most interested in—there is some other stuff I can talk about. The stuff that I am most interested in is the stuff that you folks are the ones who are the only people who can release. President Trump cannot release it. Courts cannot release it because it is sealed by the Congress.

In the late 1970s, there was a concurrent investigation of both the assassination of JFK and MLK. We have almost all of the JFK files from that investigation. We have basically zero from the MLK assassination. There is a misperception that there is this absolute seal on the material. But there was a letter that went with the seal. And that letter that went with the seal gave the Clerk, at any

given time—the Clerk of the House of Representatives—the discretion to release files.

Now, I believe the Clerk should direct the archives, the Legislative Archive Center in D.C.—it is not the one at NARA 2—to release the material, but selectively. And I talked with the liaison, Danny Coulson. He is a fairly legendary figure in FBI circles, who was the liaison between the House Select Committee on Assassinations and the Justice Department. And he concurred with my assessment, which is that is a very easy thing to do, to release just the material that they got from witnesses to the crime, from suspects and who were interviewed, and take out the stuff that was likely, frankly, I believe, probably sent to the—for the very purpose of keeping that Committee from fully investigating, which is the smear stuff on Dr. King. Those are almost exclusively located within files under the FBI classification code with 100 and 105 under section E of the final report.

You just say to the Legislative Archive, expedite the release of all of the material on the assassination, the staff interviews, staff reports, executive session testimony from people who actually have information on the assassination. But let us not—we could take our time. We could do a much more deliberative process, however long it takes, with these 100 and 105 files and make sure we are not putting out—doing, again, J. Edgar Hoover’s dirty work for him. There is a way to do that.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Wexler.

Without objection, pursuant to rule 9(c), the minority and majority shall have 10 additional minutes each for extending questions.

Ms. CROCKETT. No objection.

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection, so ordered.

So, I recently had the National Archives create an AI search tool to assist with researchers being able to go through all of these documents so you could type in a keyword and be able to find something. So, I was doing some of my own research, and I came across an interesting lead in regards to a conspiracy with the assassination and the murder pertaining to MLK. So, here is I guess the series number, and I will be entering it into the archives.

Ms. CROCKETT. No objection.

Mrs. LUNA. And specifically to this, the reason why I am bringing this up is Dr. King, there was famously a hearing where the King family was awarded, I think it was, you know, a nominal—I think it was like \$1 or something for basically admission that there was a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King. Based on what I am reading here, the FBI did investigate and followup with three specific witnesses, but I do not know that the DOJ ever followed up after that. And for whatever reason, whether it was racially motivated or not, this investigation, which I think is a pretty important thing based on what I am seeing in these documents, was not, I guess, closed out fully. Can you please speak to that settlement and then also to how the lack of transparency surrounding the murder of Dr. King impacted public’s trust in government?

Dr. KING. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. It is quite a privilege. Let me first thank you for making it easier for people to ac-

cess that number—the file number where we can get the information. We really appreciate that.

Also, I wanted to mention an individual's humanity does not diminish their impact on the world because I have heard little subtle thoughts about that. But as human beings, we want the world to be a better place.

Also, the King family really appreciated the 45th Administration and now the 47th Administration in focusing on what really happened without all of the other issues and things that people want to hear, the salacious things. We are very grateful for the way that this administration is handling that.

And so just as a member of a family—and many of you, I imagine, never had a family member gunned down and shot down. That is my uncle. Then my father, choked and thrown in a swimming pool mysteriously, my father. My grandmother, playing the organ and shot down playing the Lord's Prayer in church. So, many of you have never experienced that.

And at the same time, from the time I was born to today, you know, in those years in the 1950s and the 1960s, knowing that every conversation is recorded. Somebody's following you and watching you.

And so, I think the transparency, although there were a lot of pages that my family is still trying to go through as well, that is a lot. But I think transparency and truth are so important.

You know, this is a time when our Nation feels deeply divided, and this moment offers an invitation to unity, to prayer, renewed commitment to those ideals that bind us together. So, as someone—like I say, I could not even get a telephone call from a little guy who said, can we go get an ice cream cone without wondering who is listening to that phone call. So, I think this is helpful, and I want to say thank you.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you, Dr. King.

And Mr. Wexler, to I guess then address the elephant in the room, to follow on to Dr. King's response there, do you believe the elements within the U.S. Government plotted to murder Martin Luther King, or are people justified in their skepticism in wanting answers specifically to that? It is not my objective to peddle conspiracy theories, but it does seem evident, based on what we are seeing with the declassified documents, that there was a targeted campaign by the Federal Government against a civil rights leader. And it also to me, based on what we are seeing, for example, in that one document that I showed you guys, that I do not believe that there is adequate followup in some of these very serious leads pertaining to a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King.

Mr. WEXLER. A couple of things. So, the answer to those questions might seem counterintuitive. I cannot eliminate the possibility that there was elements of the government connected to the assassination of Martin Luther King. My book does not argue that that was the main source of what ultimately killed him. What I cannot do because I know of at least two instances in 1968 that are virtually indisputable where the government knew in advance of two individuals, one a civil rights figure, one somebody who we probably would not particularly like, and they—

Mrs. LUNA. Who is the person we would not like?

Mr. WEXLER. He was one of the chief terrorists for the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi. And in both instances, the other person was Fred Hampton, and people probably find him controversial in some cases. From Chicago, there was a movie recently made about him. In both instances—and again, I may have serious problems with what the former chief terrorist for the White Knights of Ku Klux Klan was up to in 1968, but the government should not be setting you up to be shot. And in both instances, that is essentially what happened. They did not do the shooting themselves, but they basically put out the information and the red meat to people who—in law enforcement who were basically itching to do something.

Mrs. LUNA. So, you do think that it is possible that the Federal Government either had former knowledge and/or pushed people in the right direction in order to commit the assassination of Dr. King?

Mr. WEXLER. So, a key part of my book is that they were told in advance of what I believe was the plot that was eventually successful. They seemed to have—

Mrs. LUNA. On Dr. King?

Mr. WEXLER. On Martin Luther King. I do not know if it was a matter of incompetence that they did not take it seriously. That is absolutely possible in the U.S. Government. But I also know they had informants that they tried to protect. They did not take things seriously. And I know that J. Edgar Hoover probably was not unhappy with what happened on April 4. So, I cannot eliminate it. The files, though, that we are looking for, that I am sort of asking from the House Select Committee on Assassinations, they may be able to clarify that.

And to your second question, because of the way Hoover behaved, because of the way the FBI behaved in the 1960s, because of the doubts we have about the JFK assassination, I think—and because of what the Black community especially experienced for decades, murders going unsolved over and over and over again—I can maybe talk about the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Review Board eventually—you are absolutely justified in at least asking the question, did the government have a role? So, we should do everything we can to clarify that one way or the other.

Mrs. LUNA. So, just so you know, I actually just instructed the staff, so we will be following up with the National Archives and trying to obtain those HSCI documents that you are talking about, obviously not releasing information that was illegally obtained to smear Dr. King but to look at specifically the elements of the investigation and abuses of authority and power. So, we will be obtaining those. We have been pretty successful, just so you know and so investigators and the King family knows as well.

Dr. King, I have about 2 minutes and 29 seconds left in my time remaining before I go to Representative Burchett and then the hearing will end, so I would like to give that time to you to share with the American people or to maybe ask anything of us that you feel pertinent to this investigation.

Dr. KING. I like to remember 1963, the night before Mother's Day. And my mother had prepared everything, and our home was bombed. And I remember my daddy going out, standing on a car,

Reverend A.D. King. That was in Birmingham, Alabama. "If you have to hit somebody, hit me, but I would rather you go home and pray. My family and I are okay." And those were the first years I was old enough to begin to understand that there were people from other communities who were stirring up anarchy.

And the way I met those people, the people who lived in the community, went home, and they went home and prayed. And there were strangers from outside of our community there who were throwing bricks and turning over cars and things. And Daddy talked about people—everybody does not want peace. Everybody does not want love.

I cannot speak to whether it was a conspiracy or not. I am not here—just to give you my own experiences. But I have discovered that if we want peace and unity, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King said, "We must learn to live together as brothers," and all that, as sisters, "and not perish together as fools." I am reminded of my mother, who was a Democrat, and then later in these years, I have been a Democrat, an independent, and a Republican. And I used to work when I was a State legislator with the Republicans. And they would be, you are a Democrat. You cannot talk to them. Why can I not talk to you? I did not know.

But there are people in America today who still want peace, who still want unity, who still want love. And I can only urge you, we are one blood, one human race. We all bleed the same. Thank you, President Trump. That is true. I want us to come together without fear, without hatred, without division. And I remember my mother's words. She was so grateful and so tearful when President Trump put their house that had been bombed on the registry, and she thanked him. Well, Ms. Naomi, you are a Democrat, do not thank him.

I think I want to stop there. But if we choose love over hatred, truth over secrecy, and faith over fear, then the sacrifices of those who came before us, including my uncle, my father, will not have been in vain. Then my living shall not be in vain. Your living will not be in vain as you work together. Thank you.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you, Dr. King. And——

Ms. CROCKETT. I am going to do mine.

Mrs. LUNA. Okay.

Ms. CROCKETT. I am going to do some of my 10——

Mrs. LUNA. Okay. You are fine. You are fine.

Ms. CROCKETT. Well, wait a minute. Tim, you need to get somewhere? Because I will let you go. You need to go somewhere?

Mr. BURCHETT. Did you want to say something? Do you want to followup?

Ms. CROCKETT. Well, I am going to have to stay till the end anyway. Go ahead.

Mr. BURCHETT. I cannot hear what she is saying.

Mrs. LUNA. She has 10 minutes of questioning, but you can go first is what she is saying before she does hers.

Mr. BURCHETT. Oh, Okay. Okay.

Mrs. LUNA. I now recognize Tim Burchett for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, it says 10 minutes. Do not give me that. I will have an altar call up here. Yes. You know why they do not let

politicians—if you can find me some one-armed deacons, I would be a pastor, but I do not trust them with two hands.

Thank you all for being here. I guess I am one of those on the edge of the conspiracy theorist. And I was at Brushy Mountain Prison. I saw James Earl Ray when I was a young man, about 16. We used to minister to the guy who was on death row, since been electrocuted in Tennessee. And I was always reminded—I have read some books by the mob, and they always have a scapegoat, and it is always a loner, kind of a nut. I think some things need to be said. Ray was a two-bit criminal, and they caught him in London, England. I mean, what I understand, he did not have two nickels to rub together in 1968.

I remember we were going to Clarksville, Tennessee, and I heard it on the radio. I remember it because they said they were talking about President Kennedy and RFK, and then Martin Luther King had been shot. And it did not register with me. I was four years old, but I can remember. But I have since studied it. And it is always a loner. It is always a nut. It just seems to me it is just too dadgum convenient. And the mob will tell you that is what they do. When they kill somebody, they always have a scapegoat.

And I remember what a pastor friend of mine, who has never voted for me, by the way, in Knoxville—and I am naming a post office after him anyway, but it is because he is my dear friend. And he was in Memphis. He worked for Dr. King. I guess he was 17 or 18 years old. And I always remember—I was mayor of Knox County. I went to the NAACP dinner that night, big fundraiser, and, you know, they had me sitting at the head table. And I asked Middlebrook where he was sitting, and he said, they got me over here. And I said, well, Kelly and I, my wife and I, we are going to sit with you. And he said, why is that? And I said because you run with the one that brung you. And I said, these kids are standing on your shoulders. They think civil rights is something on the History Channel or something.

And we would always have Middlebrook come eat dinner with us, lunch with the young kids in my office at Calhoun's. And I remember my dear friend Colonel Julian said, "Preacher, how many times were you arrested in Memphis?" And he said, "Colonel, I think about 37." And, you know, you just think how things have changed and how, you know, we talk about how bad they are. I will tell you what, in Knoxville, Tennessee, east Tennessee, things are pretty good. Things are pretty good. We are moving in a better direction, I feel like.

But I do feel like I do not—and is it true that some members of the King family talked to James Earl Ray, and they do not think that he pulled the trigger? Is that accurate, ma'am?

Dr. KING. My cousin, Dexter Scott King, is deceased.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, ma'am.

Dr. KING. But during his lifetime, he was involved in some of those discussions. I was not personally. But yes, I was aware of that, yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. And Dexter was Dr. King's—

Dr. KING. King's son, yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. His boy, yes, ma'am.

Dr. KING. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. Yes. And I remembered very well when James Earl Ray escaped from Brushy because Dr. King's daddy, who was also a preacher, was in Tennessee at that time, just totally out of—and they caught him. They caught James Earl Ray just down the road. It was something. He did not get very far. He was not that great of a criminal. He sure was not that good of an escape artist.

But I am wondering, ma'am, why are certain pieces of the surveillance—why do you feel like they are still under seal until 2027? And something I worry about, anytime the—I do not trust the government, and I am part of the government. And I do not mind telling you that. But anytime we have our hands on something, you know, whether it be Epstein files or whatever, I have a hard time believing it. I have a hard time believing anything these knuckleheads come in here and tell me, whether we are in a skiff or anywhere else. They are so compartmentalized, and they are so—you know, maybe they are telling the truth, but it is the truth as they know it. And they are looking down the barrel of a .22, and they need to be looking down a trash can because I think it is that big. And I am sorry I talk too much, but please.

Dr. KING. May I answer it in this way? And I am only speaking not for the whole family—

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, ma'am.

Dr. KING [continuing]. And certainly in a very unofficial, personal capacity. There are so many people that are in those reports, and I think that has been said, who are gone on beyond. And so, since you cannot find them, and you cannot verify, it would not necessarily make sense to have so much of that, that we forget the purpose. And the purpose is to come together in truth and unity.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes.

Dr. KING. So, that is just my thought. I cannot say that is why, but that is what I think.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. And I have run over. Let me ask the Ranking Member if I could just go a little bit. Now, I will tell you this. I saw a lady walking down the hall from a far distance, and she was wearing bright pink. And I said, where is she going? And then she got closer. And I was about to say, Jasmine, we are supposed to be in Committee. And then she got closer, and I realized it was not Jasmine. So, if somebody comes up to you and says, this idiot Burchett just—you know. But anyway, she was lovely and dressed classy like you do, so I wanted to say that for the record, and then ask you if I could have a little more time.

Mrs. LUNA. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay, great.

Let me ask you, Mr. Wexler, and then maybe you, sir, what are your thoughts on that?

Mr. WEXLER. My thoughts on why the files are sealed? It is a little bit of speculation, but I will give you a twofold answer. One, it was self-serving for the FBI. There was a time when, you know, the public was really outraged when we found out that they were doing this stuff. And it is kind of, and should be—

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes. Let me stop you right there—

Mr. WEXLER [continuing]. Deeply embarrassing—

Mr. BURCHETT [continuing]. Real quick. I remember when we were doing something on JFK—and Representative Luna is great about bringing this stuff in. We had a doctor that was in the emergency room with JFK, and he said—he even had a diagram. And he showed the bullet—two different bullets coming from two different directions in the diagram. Now, ten years ago, that had been ABC, NBC, everybody would have blown it up. But that is just what they do. They delay, delay, delay. And what Dr. King said, I think, that these people die, and then there is nothing out there, and then all we got is vapor. But sorry, go ahead, sir.

Mr. WEXLER. And then my second would be is that, you know—

Mr. BURCHETT. And this place ought to be filled up with angry people right now. Angry Congresswomen and men ought to be ticked off. I am sorry.

Mr. WEXLER. And the second, I do think there is an element where, as it gets later on in time to what I believe Dr. King was getting at, where you start to say that you are releasing information that never should have been collected in the first place—

Mr. BURCHETT. I got you.

Mr. WEXLER [continuing]. That you do not even know it is—if it is true. And again, I could speak to you—if somebody asked me about what happened to somebody named Reverend Ed King, which was just outrageous, and I could explain that—

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes.

Mr. WEXLER [continuing]. In a further question. And maybe, you know, you start to realize, now we should not release this stuff because we should never have taken and collected it and put out this nonsense in the first place.

Mr. BURCHETT. It does not have anything to do with what is going on or what went on.

Yes, sir?

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Yes, I mean, I think the primary concern is that it was illegally obtained and should never have been obtained. And I think just generally, we should be careful about releasing surveillance, even if it was lawfully obtained.

Mr. BURCHETT. I mean, even if it was legal—

Mr. HAMADANCHY. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT [continuing]. It does not make—I mean, slavery technically was legal in this country, but it is the most horrid thing that we ever did.

Mr. HAMADANCHY. I would say, for instance, the legal standard for obtaining metadata is lower. We would obviously support raising that. But if someone collected your metadata and they did it illegally, you would not want that released to the public, even though it was collected unlawfully.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. I am out of time, but I do think this was a cover up. And I remember, Dr. Middlebrook told me, he said that they—and I am a gun guy, and that shot he made, had one foot on a toilet and one foot in a bathtub, and he leaned over to make the shot. And the next day, they had cut all the brush out from that flophouse that Ray was in, in front of it. And I have talked to so many people from Memphis I served in the legislature with,

and they just think it has been covered up, and I do not know if we will ever know on this side of eternity.

But I want to thank you all. I am sorry I rattled.

Dr. King, thank you, ma'am. I appreciate your walk with Jesus, and I appreciate your kind words that we had.

Thank you all for being here. Sorry.

Ms. CROCKETT. You are good to go.

I just want to add to the record—this was submitted to us. To the Members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, we are here to answer the question, what do the declassified MLK records reveal, and why do they matter? These documents are significant because of what they reveal to the American people about the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

I submit that there are three facts that the American people need to know to contextualize these records. First, the FBI is the main actor within this historical drama, not Dr. King. The modern Freedom of Information and Privacy Act was signed into law so the American people could petition for U.S. Executive branch agency records to hold our government accountable to the rule of law. When President Johnson signed FOIA into law, he stated, "This legislation springs from one of our most essential principles. A democracy works best when the people have all the information that the security of the Nation permits." Americans should always read executive branch agency records with an eye toward government malfeasance. Dr. King is not the one on trial here. Rather, it is the actions of the FBI.

Second, the American people need to know that the declassified and classified MLK records reveal the extreme measures the FBI undertook to destroy a private citizen due to political and ideological differences. As both the U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, with respect to intelligence activities revealed, the campaign to investigate King was not based on criminal activity or legitimate national security concerns.

Division 5 of the FBI, under the guidance of Special Agent William Sullivan, concluded early in the investigation that allegations of communist infiltration and collaboration were unfounded. Surveillance persisted because of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's personal animosity for King because King's politics of freedom, justice, and equality for all, regardless of race, ran counter to Hoover's politics. The FBI unleashed a deliberate campaign to undermine a Black freedom movement under the guise of national security. The investigation against King was not conducted in good faith. Much of the information contained in the files falls under the legal doctrine of fruit of the poisonous tree.

In 1975, Deputy Associate Director James Adams testified before a U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to intelligence activities, stating, "There were approximately 25 incidents of actions taken to discredit Dr. King. I see no statutory basis or no basis of justification for the activity. The FBI was not gathering information for prosecution or other legal ends." As Sullivan noted in an FBI memo two days after King's "I have a dream" address, the Bureau considered it unrealistic to limit their investigation to legalistic proof of, or definitely conclusive evi-

dence that would stand up in testimony in court or before congressional committees. Instead, the FBI turned to wiretaps, bugs, and clandestine monitoring to obtain or create personal information the Bureau believed would discredit Dr. King. These actions were extralegal by design and violated the Constitution the FBI claimed to defend.

The American people need to understand that the information the FBI claims to have uncovered was intended to coerce Dr. King and to discredit him in the eyes of his wife, faith communities, and the general American public. If such data was not strong enough to stand up to scrutiny in a court of law when it was obtained, we should seriously consider how it will be unleashed and weaponized in a court of public opinion.

Finally, the American people need to know that the declassified and classified records have living victims. While Dr. King was the immediate target, the FBI's dragnet ensnared so many more. The victims of this story are not abstractions. They are living people who were denied privacy, dignity, and justice. This includes the King children, two of whom are still living. Since the King's family home telephone was wiretapped, it is very likely that the voices, laughter, and cries of these innocent children were heard, recorded, and documented by the Federal Government simply because their father led a nonviolent protest movement to push America to be true to its founding documents.

We must always center the voices and rights of those harmed. If we are serious about democratic accountability, no matter which party is in power, then the disclosure of executive branch agency records, such as those that are being discussed this morning, must be accompanied by truth telling. The American people must have all the information necessary to maintain a functioning, deliberate democracy in which those who govern are accountable to the governed. If not, this historical saga we are discussing today will continue to haunt us in the form of unchecked government power. Thank you.

This was a statement from Lerone Martin, director of the MLK Research and Education Institute at Stanford University.

I then have a couple of UCs, and we can wrap. I ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record an *NBC News* article titled, "Trump is Turning Dr. King's Dream Into a Nightmare. Did Civil Rights Martyrs Die in Vain?"

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. I ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record a *New York Times* article titled, "The Many Political Interpretations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Legacy."

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. The next one is a *Times* article titled, "With MLK Files Released, Trump Plays Fire With a Legacy Whose Importance He Doesn't Fully Grasp."

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. There is another one where it says, "Trump Says DEI Civil Rights Policies Hurt White People. Do They?"

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. This one is from the *ACLU*. It says, "Trump's Attempt to Roll Back Key Civil Rights Enforcement Tool."

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. CNN article, "Judge Deals Blow to Trump Justice Department's Use of Civil Rights Act to Clean Voter Rolls."

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. And the final one is from the *Southern Poverty Law Center*, and it is titled, "Trump Executive Action on Voting Explained."

Mrs. LUNA. Without objection.

Ms. CROCKETT. And with that, I will yield.

Mrs. LUNA. In closing, I want to thank our witnesses once again for their testimony today. I now yield to Ranking Member Crockett for closing remarks.

Ms. CROCKETT. I yield back.

Mrs. LUNA. I now recognize myself for closing remarks.

With that, and without objection, all Members will have five legislative days within which to submit materials and additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses.

If there is no further business, without objection, this Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:22 p.m., the Task Force was adjourned.]

