The Rhetorical Significance of What Barr Omitted

Research in communication documents, and common sense suggests, what one doesn’t say may be as if not more significant rhetorically than what is said. Case in point: We now are learning from several media sources that special counsel Robert Mueller’s report may be more than 300 pages in length.

If this is correct, which itself is staggering and implies a great deal about what is not known, shouldn’t we—regardless of our partisan beliefs—be extremely troubled by the fact that attorney general Bill Barr’s four page summary letter to Congress quoted less than 100 words from the Mueller report? Isn’t it also appropriate to wonder why the length of the report was omitted in Barr’s summary?

From a rhetorical perspective, regardless of his intent, the media coverage and storyline would have been far different on Sunday had Barr included the size of
the report. As has been the case from the start, the investigation is being fought as a public relations battle—perhaps more than a search for truth.

The rhetorical challenge for Democrats, therefore, will be convincing the public that allotting additional time to examination of the Mueller report is in their best interest—especially since Trump and the Republicans now are waging a vigorous effort to turn the tables on the Democrats in Congress, claiming that from the beginning they accused the President of wrongdoing instead of solving the country’s problems.

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