The Rhetorical Significance of What Barr Omitted

March 29, 2019

Research in communication documents—and common sense suggests—what isn’t said 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 that a great deal is not known, we should 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 at least curious that the length of the report was omitted in Barr’s summary?

From a communication perspective, 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 more than a search for truth, and now the office of the attorney general of the United States may be tarnished for its brazen partisan conduct.

The rhetorical challenge for Democrats, therefore, is to convince the public that a thorough examination of the Mueller report is in their best interest—especially
since Trump and the Republicans are waging a vigorous effort to leverage the truncated summary of the report and advance an ideological agenda. For example, the President and his supporters are turning the tables on the Democrats in Congress, asserting that from the beginning they accused the President of wrongdoing without evidence instead of solving the country’s problems.

*Rick Cherwitz, Austin, TX*