



[THE PRACTICAL SKEPTIC MICK WEST

Mick West is a writer, investigator, and debunker who enjoys looking into the evidence behind conspiracy theories and strange phenomena and then explaining what is actually going on. He runs the Metabunk forum and is the author of the book *Escaping the Rabbit Hole*.

UFO Whistleblowers Go to Washington

UFOlogy exists in a constant state of frustration. Its adherents *know*, sometimes based on deeply personal experiences and sometimes based on their study of the proffered evidence, that UFOs represent something beyond humanity as we know it. UFOs, they think, are alien visitors from another world, or perhaps interdimensional entities, time travelers, or even angelic beings.

Science, unfortunately, remains unconvinced. Driven by evidence and testable hypotheses, the scientific examination of UFOs (or UAP, as they have recently been rebranded) has been stymied by the annoying absence of both those things. UFO photos remain blurry. Anecdotes about giant triangular craft flying overhead or visits by grey beings never rise to the standard of scientific evidence. Scientists take a pass.

Seeking to explain this disconnect between their deep-seated personal beliefs and the extraordinary lack of scientific data to back it up, the believers in nonhuman intelligence reach for an old standby: a vast conspiracy.

According to this conspiracy, the government has been collecting and hiding all the good evidence on UFOs since the 1940s. The conspiracy theory has a rich and detailed narrative centering around the idea that UFOs occasionally crash, and the government swoops in to gather the remains—sometimes including alien bodies—and transports them to secret military facilities for further study.

We are all familiar with the key elements that make up this story, because it has become part of popular culture. Roswell was the site of one of the first alleged crashes. Area 51 is a legendary secret base rumored to contain flying saucers. Men in



Alleged UFO tracked through U.S. Navy aircraft Heads Up Display.

Black arrive to collect UFO debris and silence witnesses. Grey aliens visit ordinary people in their dreams and, occasionally, presidents in underground bases.

But none of this stirs the scientist. It's all allegedly hidden away in classified programs denied by the government. The evidence of alien visitors is supposedly right there, in a few hangars, but somehow nothing verifiable has leaked out. An eighty-plus-year program has somehow been wrapped up tight in an implausibly successful wall of institutional secrecy. If UFOlogists are to get the validation they so desperately crave, they need someone to breach that wall. They need a whistleblower.

Hopes have been raised before, and various figures have come forward claiming to blow the whistle. Jesse Marcell spent many years trying to persuade people that he's seen evidence of aliens at Roswell. In the 1990s, Robert Dean, a U.S. Army Command Sergeant Major, claimed to have seen top-secret

documents proving alien visitation. Bob Lazar said he was hired to work on reverse-engineering flying saucers. More recently, Eric Davis claimed the Pentagon had "off-world vehicles not made on this earth."

There were many others, but again none of them stirred scientists or even the media to take the topic seriously. The claims were outlandish and impossible to verify. The individuals often seemed unreliable. No actual evidence was presented, only stories. They needed something and someone better.

A New Hope

That someone was to be David Grusch, a former Air Force officer and intelligence official with a degree in physics and a seemingly impeccable resume. He'd worked with the Pentagon's UAP task force and had investigated secret UFO-related programs. He was going to be the one to blow the whole alien cover-up wide open.

Grusch did not spring fully formed onto the UFO scene; instead, his debut was orchestrated, staged, and carefully managed by a small group of like-minded individuals.

It seemingly started back in June 2022, when Grusch met George Knapp and Jeremy Corbell at a UFO conference. Knapp is a journalist specializing in UFOs, and Corbell is a UFO filmmaker well known for hyping “leaked” UFO videos that, invariably, turn out to be disappointing.

They met again a few months later at a *Star Trek* convention in Las Vegas. Grusch confided that he had some knowledge of a secret government program to do with alien technology. But he was also going through a legal procedure complaining about reprisals he thought he’d received for speaking out about that program.

Grusch was introduced to the inner circle of UFOlogy, specifically former Pentagon UFO investigator Luis Elizondo, biology professor Garry Nolan, and former government official Chris Mellon—all of whom were part of rock-star Tom DeLonge’s “To The Stars” UFO investigation academy back in 2018.

They must have felt like they had struck gold. All of them had been involved for years, trying to build on the momentum of the 2017 *New York Times* article by Leslie Kean and Ralph Blumenthal that is at the root of the current media and government interest in UFOs. Success had been limited. There was some UFO-friendly legislation (shepherded by Mellon) and a lot of media coverage. But the good evidence always seemed just out of reach, behind the walls of government secrecy.

Enter Grusch. His legal issues meant they had to tread carefully. A plan was formed. Mindful of the attention the story would bring, Grusch’s internet presence was scrubbed, including his brief career as a realtor. Media inquiries were made in March 2023. Kean and Blumenthal were brought back to write Grusch’s story. Feelers were put out to media outlets. Rumors started to swirl in the UFO groups on Twitter and Reddit about a possible whistleblower.

UFO-friendly politicians were cu-



Pilots Ryan Graves and David Fravor give congressional testimony along with David Grusch.

rated and prepped. Congressman Tim Burchett foreshadowed the big reveal, saying crashed alien technology was likely “being reverse-engineered right now” (Cook 2023).

In April, Kean and Blumenthal interviewed Grusch and wrote their article. A preliminary draft was offered to *The New York Times*, which rejected the story this time. They then went to *The Washington Post*, which agreed to publish it with sufficient fact-checking.

The following month, an Australian journalist with a long history of UFO stories, Ross Coulthart, recorded an interview with Grusch. At about this time, Grusch was also going on something of a roadshow with Nolan and others, reportedly visiting Canadian opposition members of Parliament and other officials and politicians in the United States. Things were going great.

The Rush to Disclosure

Suddenly though, the plan changed. One member of the team, lawyer Daniel Sheehan, accidentally mentioned David Grusch’s name on a podcast. People started to dig in and make connections. Grusch got phone calls at his home asking about UFOs. Suddenly there was pressure to get the story out.

They asked *The Washington Post* if they could publish sooner. The newspaper declined, citing a lack of time for full fact-checking. So they went with a small online UFO-friendly media

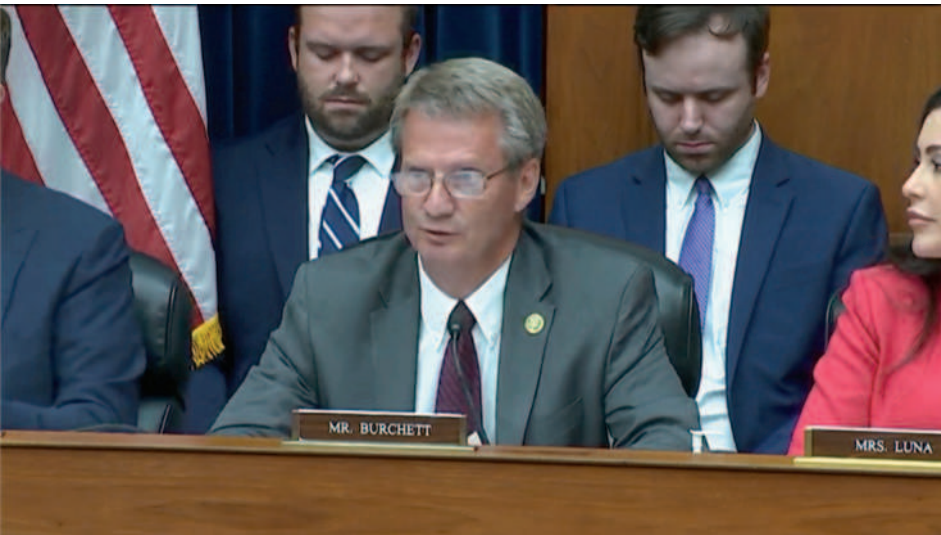
outlet called *The Debrief*, which leaped at the chance to publish such a big story. They were more flexible with the fact-checking schedule, and on June 5, 2023, David Grusch was revealed to the world (Kean 2023).

The story they published seems almost tame in light of subsequent events. It mostly covered Grusch’s history, credentials, and reputation (vouched for by several people). But the core of it was still extraordinary: the government had recovered “intact and partially intact craft” of extraterrestrial origin.

A few days later, an edited version of Coulthart’s interview with Grusch was published on NewsNation—a fledgling TV news station owned by Nexstar Media, who also owns Knapp and Corbell’s Mystery Wire website.

The interview went far beyond Kean’s article. Grusch repeated the claim of recovered technology but added that there were also recovered alien bodies. Not only that, but the aliens had, on occasion, killed humans. Grusch spoke carefully but also hinted that there were multiple races of aliens involved and that the U.S. government may have an “agreement” with one of them. Oh—and by the way they might also be from another dimension.

It wasn’t just the American government; apparently other world powers were in the same situation. Everyone—China, Russia, and presumably other countries—not only had crashed flying saucers but were trying to reverse-en-



Representatives Tim Burchett and Anna Paulina Luna at the hearing

gineer them. Did they all have alien bodies? Did they have agreements with murderous malevolent interdimensional beings? It was all a bit vague.

Too Much Disclosure

The claims were extraordinary, and many UFO enthusiasts lapped it up as confirmation of what they already suspected (or “knew”). But others recognized that the claims went a bit too far. Even Leslie Kean seemed annoyed—and blindsided. Grusch had never told her about the alien bodies. But even if he had, she confessed, she would not have written about them, as that wasn’t her focus. Kean has admitted in the past that she tones down UFO stories to make them more acceptable.

The rest of the media seemed off balance; very few of them covered the story. NewsNation got massive viewing figures for the interview and so had extensive subsequent coverage of the topic—even interviewing me. But alien craft and bodies didn’t make it to the front page anywhere else. It was just too weird—and, crucially, lacking in evidence. Grusch presented no documents (in public) and relied mostly on what *he claimed to have been told* by unnamed sources, things he could not share in detail.

The Circus in Congress

The politicians who were courted by the promoters had fewer qualms. Tim

Burchett teamed up with Florida freshman representative Anna Paulina Luna and managed to arrange for a congressional hearing to be held a few weeks later.

This was fêted by the UFO community, once more, as the (or at least *a*) long-awaited “disclosure.” Multiple whistleblowers were going to come forward. Names would be named. The locations of the UFOs would be revealed. It would be the government finally forced to admit they had alien bodies.

No such thing happened. Instead of additional whistleblowers, two military pilots, Ryan Graves and David Fravor, simply repeated stories of UFO encounters that they had told many times over the past decade. Very little was new.

Grusch said less than he did in his NewsNation interview. Multiple times he would be asked interesting questions, only to respond that he could not discuss that matter in a public setting. He did reiterate that there was a secret alien technology reverse engineering program and that there were bodies (or, at least, “biologics”). But no actual evidence of this was given; nobody was even told where to look.

Also present at the hearing was the team that had put him there. Knapp and Corbell sat just behind Grusch, framing him in every shot. Burchett entered statements from them into the congressional record (it was later revealed that they were supposed to speak at the hear-

ing). Sheehan, Mellon, and Kean were all backstage, watching their creation.

What’s Happening?

Some people think Grusch is lying, but I tend to agree with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley that Grusch “was trying to say whatever he thought was true” (Wolfgang 2023). Grusch seems to believe his claims, but given their fantastical nature, the utter lack of evidence, and the dubious supporting cast, it makes it very difficult to give them any credence.

Grusch submitted his impressive resume into the congressional record. It lists many things, but the most recent entry is that he is now COO of the Sol Foundation, which he grandiosely describes as “The premier center for research in the natural and social sciences, engineering, and the humanities.” The Sol Foundation was founded by Garry Nolan and Chris Mellon to support “research into and the understanding of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena.” Like their previous endeavor with Tom DeLonge, it seeks to actualize a baseless but deeply held belief in alien visitors.

This is an evolving story, and we should know more after this goes to press. But something strange is going on. Individuals’ beliefs in aliens are getting mixed up with secret government programs, perhaps even deeply hidden programs. Relationships within the military-industrial complex worth billions of dollars might come under scrutiny, or perhaps this is all a big distraction or a giant misunderstanding. Time, I hope, will tell. ■

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