

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Trump lawyers fight to shield items seized in FBI raid

NEW YORK — Lawyers for President Donald Trump and his personal attorney, Michael Cohen, told a federal judge in New York today that they believe some of the documents and devices seized from Cohen during an FBI raid are protected by attorney-client privilege, and they want a chance to review the items before prosecutors get to examine them.

In the hour-long court hearing, U.S. District Judge Kimba Wood said Cohen's lawyers have asked to "take the first cut at identifying documents that are relevant or not relevant to the investigation."

An attorney for the president, Joanna Hendon, appeared as well, telling the judge that Trump has "an acute interest in this matter."

"This is of most concern to him. I think the public is a close second. And anyone who has ever hired a lawyer a close third," she said.

Federal agents seized records on a variety of subjects in raids Monday on Cohen's Manhattan office, apartment and hotel room, including payments that were made in 2016 to women who might have damaging information about Trump.

The court hearing today didn't provide new insight into why agents seized the items, but the judge, prosecutors and the attorneys all spoke openly about an investigation that previously has been shrouded in secrecy.

Wood adjourned the hearing until later in the day. It was unclear whether that session will be open or closed to the public. The judge said sealing the proceedings might be needed to protect "the privacy interests of potentially innocent people."

FBI and Justice Department officials have refused to say what crimes they are investigating, but people familiar with the investigation have said the search warrant used in the raids sought bank records, business records on Cohen's dealing in the taxi industry, Cohen's communications with the Trump campaign and information on payments made to a former Playboy model, Karen McDougal, and a porn actress, Stephanie Clifford, who performs under the name Stormy Daniels. Both women say they had affairs with Trump.

Trump flips on trade pact, weighs rejoining Pacific-Rim deal

WASHINGTON — In a striking reversal, President Donald Trump has asked trade officials to explore the possibility of the United



AP Photo/Matt York

Teachers at Humphrey Elementary school in Chandler, Ariz., participate in a state-wide walk-in prior to classes Wednesday.

Arizona governor bends to teacher demands

PHOENIX — As recently as Tuesday, a defiant Arizona governor refused to meet with teachers threatening to strike over low pay and said he was sticking with a 1 percent raise proposal.

By Thursday, Republican Doug Ducey managed to scrape \$274 million from the cash-starved state's coffers to offer a 9 percent wage hike starting this fall. He's following that with 5 percent more each in the 2019 and 2020 school years. He's also counting the 1 percent raise the Legislature approved for the current school year to call it a 20 percent overall raise.

The teacher-led rebellion over low wages and funding cuts spread from its genesis in West Virginia to Arizona, Kentucky and Oklahoma.

The Great Recession forced legislatures nationwide to slash budgets and make major cuts across all spending areas. However, in Arizona legislators also passed major corporate tax cuts designed to phase in as the economy recovered. As such, Arizona's budgets are still exceptionally tight a decade after the recession. In addition to a 20 percent pay bump, Arizona teachers also demanded a permanent raise structure, a \$1 billion boost to put education funding at pre-recession levels and no more tax cuts until per pupil spending matches the national average.

Teachers who organized a grassroots effort that drew nearly 45,000 members were cool to the announcement, saying they wanted details before reacting and lacked trust in the governor.

States rejoining the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, a free trade deal he pulled out of during his first days in office as part of his "America first" agenda.

Trump's request comes as he faces pressure from farm-state Republicans anxious that his protectionist trade policies could spiral into a trade war with China that would hit rural America. Trump spent the 2016 presidential campaign ripping into the multi-national pact, saying he could get a better deal for U.S. businesses by negotiating one-on-one with countries in the Pacific Rim. Now, faced with political consequences of the action, Trump appears to be reconsidering.

Trump first disclosed his request Thursday to a group of lawmakers at a White House meeting on trade. Lawmakers have been pressing Trump to shift course after escalating trade threats, including China's plan to slap tariffs on

soybeans and other U.S. crops.

The apparent decision comes after the 11 other TPP countries went ahead last month and signed the pact in Santiago, Chile — without the United States. The agreement is meant to establish freer trade in the Asia-Pacific region and put pressure on China to open its markets to compete with and perhaps eventually join the bloc.

Japan cautiously responded early today to Trump's request. Government spokesman Yoshihide Suga in Tokyo said Japan welcomes the request if it means Trump recognizes the significance of the pact. He added, though, that it would be difficult to renegotiate only parts of the TPP, describing the agreement as delicate.

It's unclear how willing the other 11 countries would be to reopen the agreement and make concessions to lure the United States back, though its economic power would likely be an appeal.

Meanwhile, administration officials are escalating their pressure campaign against China. The U.S. may soon release a list of products that would be subject to the new tariffs Trump has threatened to slap on \$100 billion in Chinese goods. And the U.S. Treasury is working on plans to restrict Chinese technology investments in the United States.

Backpage.com CEO pleads guilty, will testify against others

SACRAMENTO — The chief executive of Backpage.com pleaded guilty to state and federal charges including conspiracy and money laundering, and agreed to testify in ongoing prosecutions against others at the website that authorities have dubbed a lucrative nationwide "online brothel," authorities said.

"For far too long, Backpage.com existed as the dominant marketplace for illicit commercial sex, a place where sex traffickers frequently advertised children and adults alike," U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement. "But this illegality stops right now."

Backpage brought in a half-billion dollars since it began in 2004, mostly through prominent risqué advertising for escorts and massages, among other services and some goods for sale, according to federal prosecutors. Authorities allege the site was often used to traffic underage victims, while company officials said they tried to scrub the site of such ads.

Chief Executive Officer Carl Ferrer will serve no more than five years in prison under a California agreement in which he pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy and three counts of money laundering in California. Also Thursday, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announced the company pleaded guilty to human trafficking.

And a federal judge in Phoenix unsealed an April 5 plea deal revealing that Ferrer pleaded guilty to conspiracy, and Backpage.com pleaded guilty to money laundering conspiracy.

Under his plea agreement, Ferrer agreed to make the company's data available to law enforcement as investigations and prosecutions continue. The guilty pleas are the latest in a cascade of developments in the last week against the company founded by the former owners of the Village Voice in New York City, Michael Lacey, 69, and James Larkin, 68.

The U.S. Justice Department also seized and shut down the website, and Ferrer's federal plea deal requires him to help the government seize all the company's assets.

Larkin and Lacey remain jailed in Arizona while awaiting hearings on whether they should be released after pleading not guilty to federal charges alleging they helped publish ads for sexual services.

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