

Trump prodded Ukraine leader to investigate Bidens

White House releases account of phone call

By **MICHAEL BALSAMO** and **ZEKE MILLER**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump repeatedly prodded Ukraine’s new leader to work with the U.S. attorney general and lawyer Rudy Giuliani to investigate Democratic political rival Joe Biden, according to a rough transcript summarizing the call released Wednesday.

In the call this summer, Trump raised allegations, without citing any evidence, that the former vice president sought to interfere with a Ukrainian prosecutor in regard to his son, Hunter.

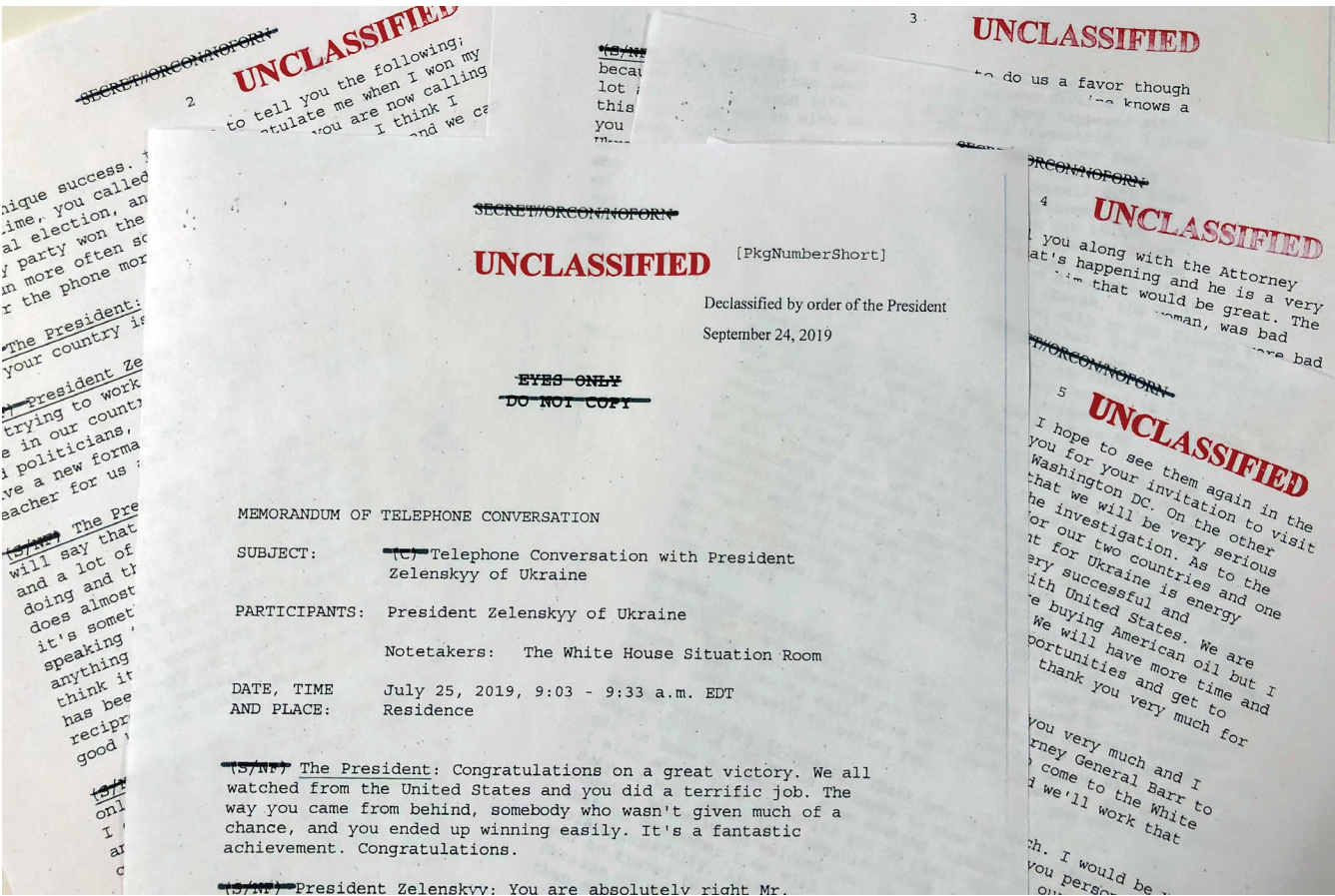
“Whatever you can do with the attorney general would be great,” Trump told President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, asking for help in investigating Biden. He referred to Giuliani, his personal attorney and trusted adviser, as a “highly respected man” and said, “I will ask him to call you along with the attorney general.”

After saying Giuliani and Barr would be in touch, Trump referenced Ukraine’s economy, saying: “Your economy is going to get better and better I predict. You have a lot of assets. It’s a great country.”

Zelenskyy had earlier raised to Trump his desire to purchase additional Javelin anti-tank missiles from the U.S.

The conversation between the two leaders is one piece of a whistleblower’s complaint, which followed the July 25 call and is central to the formal impeachment inquiry launched Tuesday by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The White House account reveals that Trump was willing to engage a foreign leader to dig up dirt on a political foe and that he went so far as to volunteer his attorney general to help. But



A White House-released rough transcript of President Donald Trump’s July 25, 2019 telephone conversation with Ukraine’s newly elected president Volodymyr Zelenskyy was released Wednesday.

Trump appears to stop short in the call of any explicit quid pro quo, such as linking Ukraine’s help to American military aid or other assistance.

Days before the call, Trump froze nearly \$400 million in aid to Ukraine. It was not clear from the summary whether Zelenskyy was aware of that, and the White House did not respond to requests to clarify. The president has insisted he did nothing wrong and has denied that any request for help was tied to the aid freeze.

It’s illegal under federal law to seek foreign government assistance for U.S. elections.

The release of the rough transcript sets the parameters of the political debate to come. Trump, at the U.N. on Wednesday, dismissed it and said as he often does that’s he’s the victim of “the single greatest witch hunt in American history.” Democrats say it lays the groundwork for the congressional impeachment inquiry.



Evan Vucci/AP Photo

President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting at the InterContinental Barclay hotel during the United Nations General Assembly on Monday in New York.

Trump aides believed that his oblique, message-by-suggestion style of speaking would not lend itself to the discovery of a “smoking gun” in Wednesday’s summary. His previous messages to his staff were at the center of special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into obstruction of justice in the Trump-Russia case.

Trump is direct in raising the question of Joe

and Hunter Biden and a Ukrainian prosecutor: “There’s a lot of talk about Biden’s son, that Biden stopped the prosecution and a lot of people want to find out about that.”

In the conversation, Trump doesn’t distinguish between the roles of Giuliani, his personal attorney and political ally, and Barr, who as the nation’s top law enforcement offi-

cer is supposed to be above the political fray. Barr has been a staunch defender of Trump, most notably during the Mueller investigation.

It’s not the first time Trump has sought foreign assistance to undermine a political rival. He publicly asked Russia to find missing Hillary Clinton emails in 2016, but this is his first documented time doing so while president with the weight of the U.S. government at his disposal.

The White House did not say whether there are any records of Giuliani’s communications with Zelenskyy, nor did it address whether the president’s personal attorney learned anything from them. The White House has also not commented on whether Trump discussed Biden on an April 21 call with the

Ukrainian leader or with any other foreign power.

The president took the 30-minute call from the White House residence, while officials in the Situation Room listened in and worked to keep a record of the conversation, as is standard practice. They used voice recognition software, but the call was not recorded. Trump ordered the document declassified Tuesday.

The release came against the backdrop of the president presiding over a meeting of world leaders at the United Nations, a remarkable split screen even for the turbulence of the Trump era.

The inspector general for the intelligence community wrote to the acting Director of National Intelligence in August that he believed the conversation between Trump and Ukraine’s leader could have been a federal campaign finance violation because the president could have been soliciting a campaign contribution from a foreign government, a Justice Department official said.

The whistleblower — a member of the intelligence community — said in their complaint that they had heard the information from “White House officials,” but did not have firsthand knowledge of the call, the Justice Department official said.

Prosecutors from the department reviewed a transcript of the call and determined the president did not violate campaign finance law. The determination was made based on the elements of the allegation, and there was no consideration of the department’s policy that a sitting president cannot be indicted, the official said.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss internal investigative deliberations.



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