

# White House denies, defends as new bombshells hit

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump personally appealed to FBI Director James Comey to abandon the bureau's investigation into National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, according to notes disclosed late Tuesday that Comey wrote after the meeting. The White House issued a furious denial near the end of a tumultuous day spent beating back potentially disastrous news reports from dawn to dusk.

The bombshell Comey news came as the beleaguered administration was still struggling mightily to explain Monday's revelation that the president had disclosed highly classified information to the Russian foreign minister and the country's ambassador to the United States.

Defending Trump's actions, officials played down the importance and secrecy of the information, which had been supplied by Israel under an intelligence-sharing agreement, and Trump himself said he had "an absolute right" as president to share "facts pertaining to terrorism" and airline safety with Russia. Yet U.S. allies and some members of Congress expressed concern bordering on alarm.

As for Comey, whom Trump fired last week, the FBI director wrote in a memo after a February meeting at the White House that the new president had asked him to shut down the FBI's investigation of Flynn and his Russian contacts, said a person who had read the memo. The Flynn investigation was part of a broader probe into Russian interference in last year's presidential election.

Comedy's memo, an apparent effort to create a paper trail of his contacts with the White House, would be the clearest evidence to date that the president has tried to influence the investigation.

Rep. Jason Chaffetz, Republican chairman of the House oversight committee, sent a letter to the FBI on Tuesday requesting that it turn over all documents



In this May 8 file photo, then-FBI Director James Comey speaks to the Anti-Defamation League National Leadership Summit in Washington. The White House is disputing a report that President Donald Trump asked Comey to shut down an investigation into ousted national security adviser Michael Flynn.

AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File

and recordings that detail communications between Comey and Trump. He said he would give the FBI a week and then "if we need a subpoena we'll do it."

The panel's top Democrat, Elijah Cummings of Maryland, a constant Trump critic, called the allegation of Trump pressure on Comey "explosive" and said "it appears like a textbook case of criminal obstruction of justice."

Republicans weren't going that far. But John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the Trump-Russia reports were "deeply disturbing" and could impede allies' willingness to share intelligence with the U.S.

Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader of the Senate, said simply: "It would be helpful to have less drama emanating from the White House."

The person who described the Comey memo to the AP was not authorized to discuss it by name and spoke on condition of anonymity. The existence of the memo was first reported Tuesday by *The New York Times*.

The White House vigorously denied it all. "While the president has repeatedly expressed his view that General Flynn is a decent man who served and protected our country, the president has never asked Mr. Comey or anyone else to end any investigation, including any investigation involving General Flynn," a White House statement said.

Trump fired Flynn on Feb. 13, on grounds that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other officials about his contacts with Russians.

The intensifying drama comes as Trump is set to embark Friday on his first

foreign trip, which had been optimistically viewed by some aides as an opportunity to reset an administration floundering under an inexperienced president.

When Trump fired Comey, he said he did so based on Comey's very public handling of the Hillary Clinton email probe and how it affected his leadership of the FBI. But the White House has provided differing accounts of the firing. And lawmakers have alleged that the sudden ouster was an attempt to stifle the bureau's investigation into Trump associates' ties to Russia's meddling in the campaign.

Mark Warner of Virginia, top Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee, said he would ask Comey for additional material as part of that panel's investigation. "Memos, transcripts, tapes — the list keeps getting longer," he said.

## Contradictions create credibility gap for aides

WASHINGTON (AP) — When the report burst forth alleging that President Donald Trump had revealed highly classified information to Russian diplomats, the White House quickly dispatched Trump's national security adviser to declare that the story "as reported is false."

By the next morning, however, H.R. McMaster's pronouncement was undercut by Trump himself, making the aide the latest to face a public conflict with the boss in a White House where credibility problems are becoming an occupational hazard.

Yes, the president said, he had given information to the Russians. But there was nothing wrong with that, he insisted. In two tweets, Trump said the conversation with the diplomats was an acceptable way to provide facts related to airline safety and terrorism, and he declared he had "the absolute right" to share the details.

Still, the day-after accounts prompted questions about McMaster's earlier comments on the story that was first reported by *The Washington Post*.

These types of conflicts are a near-constant in the Trump administration, which has tangled over accounts involving issues ranging from the size of Trump's inaugural crowd to the firing of former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and Trump's claims that President Barack Obama wiretapped Trump Tower.

Trump has frequently tasked aides and surrogates with delivering apparently false or misleading statements or to aggressively argue points that the president later contradicts.

The conflicted informa-

tion has made it harder for aides to effectively advocate for the president.

"It's always a hard job, but there's no question in my mind the president has made it harder for his immediate staff, which is there to support him," said Ari Fleischer, press secretary to Republican President George W. Bush.

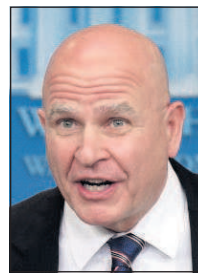
Trump himself has raised doubts about the credibility of what his representatives say. He tweeted last week that

since he's a very active president, it's not always possible for his surrogates to speak with perfect accuracy. He also suggested "maybe the best thing to do would be to cancel all future 'press briefings' and hand out written responses for the sake of accuracy???"

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer got off to a rocky start with beat reporters on the second day of the administration when he delivered a tirade about reporting on the Inauguration Day crowds. Trump had already blasted the media over its reports — accurate — about the numbers.

Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, has also tangled with the media over the believability of her statements, saying earlier this year in a television appearance that Flynn had Trump's full confidence, hours before Trump fired him. She also referred to a "Bowling Green Massacre" that never occurred.

And Vice President Mike Pence insisted Flynn had not discussed Obama-era Russian sanctions with the Russian ambassador to the U.S., Sergey Kislyak. That was untrue, something the White House blamed on Flynn when Trump fired him a month later.



McMaster

## Fox News host up for press secretary job

NEW YORK (AP) — Fox News host Kimberly Guilfoyle is in conversations with the Trump administration about replacing Sean Spicer as White House press secretary.

The former first lady of San Francisco told the Mercury News in San Jose, California, on Monday that taking that job or having another press role in the White House has been "raised by a number of people" in the Trump administration.



Guilfoyle

"I'm a patriot, and it would be an honor to serve the country," Spicer said. "I think it'd be a fascinating job. It's a challenging job, and you need someone really determined and focused, a great communicator in there with deep knowledge to be able to handle that position."

Guilfoyle, who is one of the co-hosts of the Fox News show "The Five," said she's regularly in touch with members of the administration as part of her job.

The network said in a statement that Guilfoyle "is a valued member of the FOX News primetime lineup, and is under a long-term contract with the network."

Guilfoyle, 48, is a former San Francisco and Los Angeles prosecutor who was married for four years to California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom. The two separated in 2005 when she moved to New York to start a career in television.

She was originally considered for press secretary during the presidential transition, but the job went to Spicer, who was spokesman for the Republican National Committee.



Spicer



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