

Lawmakers intend to question Trump campaign chairman

WASHINGTON (AP) — The scope of congressional investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential contest came into sharper focus on Wednesday as lawmakers said they intended to question the former chairman of the Trump campaign and to determine whether Russian social media “trolls” were connected to Trump’s election efforts.

The Senate Judiciary Committee plans to question former campaign chairman Paul Manafort and will subpoena him if necessary, according to the panel’s Republican chairman, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa. He said he and the committee’s top Democrat, Dianne Feinstein of California, have agreed to try to bring Manafort before the panel for questioning about the government’s enforcement of a law requiring registration of foreign lobbyists. Feinstein’s office confirmed that they plan to question him.

Manafort would certainly also be asked about his participation in a Trump Tower meeting last summer with President Donald Trump’s eldest son and son-in-law, where the purpose was to hear potentially damaging information about Hillary Clinton from a Russian lawyer.

Manafort disclosed the meeting in a package of information he provided to the Senate and House intelligence committees, who have been investigating potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign, as is Robert Mueller, the former FBI director appointed by the Justice Department as the special counsel.

“Obviously it would be appropriate for anybody to get into anything that went on at that meeting, and he was at that meeting,” Grassley told Iowa reporters.

A person close to Manafort said that he hasn’t yet received a letter from the Senate Judiciary Committee about a possible interview. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss Manafort’s private interactions with the committee.

A spokesman for Grassley said Wednesday afternoon that Grassley was working with Mueller to ensure that any plans to question

Manafort don’t conflict with any criminal investigation, and that if conflicts do exist, the senator will “work to find a way for the committee to proceed with its oversight responsibility.”

Separately, Rep. Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the House intelligence committee, said his panel wants to look at the use of Russian social media “trolls” and whether they were connected to the Trump election campaign.

That concern is “certainly something we want to explore,” along with the Trump campaign’s data analytics, as part of a broader committee investigation into Russian meddling, Schiff said. Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, oversaw digital strategy for the campaign.

The lawmakers spoke one day after Donald Trump Jr. disclosed on Twitter a series of emails that revealed his eagerness to hear negative material on Clinton from a Russian lawyer.

The exchange showed Trump Jr. conversing with a music publicist who wanted him to meet with a “Russian government attorney” who supposedly had dirt on Clinton as “part of Russia and its government’s support for Mr. Trump.” He was told the Russian government had information that could “incriminate” Clinton and her dealings with Russia.

“I love it,” Trump Jr. said in one email response.

In an interview before departing Wednesday evening for France, Trump told Reuters that he didn’t know about the meeting “until a couple of days ago when I heard about this.” He also said that he didn’t fault his son for attending. “I think many people would have held that meeting,” he said.

Trump also said in a tweet that his son was “open, transparent and innocent” and again dismissed the ongoing Russia investigation as the “greatest Witch Hunt in political history.”

But Trump also refused to dispute an assertion made by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Trump believed him when he said that Russia hadn’t meddle in the election during their lengthy meeting in Germany last week.



Manafort

Trump says he’ll be ‘angry’ if health care bill flops

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday he will be “very angry” if the Senate fails to pass a revamped Republican health care bill and said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell must “pull it off,” intensifying pressure on party leaders laboring to win over unhappy GOP senators and preserve the teetering measure.

Trump’s remarks came a day before McConnell, R-Ky., planned to release his revised legislation to a closed-door meeting of GOP senators. The new legislation would keep most of the initial Medicaid cuts and makes other changes aimed at nailing down support, but internal GOP disputes lingered that were threatening to sink it.

With all Democrats set to vote no, McConnell was moving toward a do-or-die roll call next week on beginning debate, a motion that will require backing from 50 of the 52 GOP senators.

Conservative Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said Wednesday he would oppose the motion and moderate Republican Susan Collins of Maine seemed all but sure to do the same — leaving McConnell with zero margin for error to sustain his party’s goal of toppling President Barack Obama’s health care law. Several other GOP senators were holdouts as well, leaving McConnell and his lieutenants just days to win them over or face a major defeat.

FBI nominee rejects Trump claim: Probe no witch hunt

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump’s pick to lead the FBI broke with the president in key areas Wednesday, rejecting the idea that an investigation into possible coordination between Russia and the Trump election campaign is a “witch hunt” and promising not to cave to any pressure from a White House that has challenged boundaries with the nation’s top law enforcement agency.

Christopher Wray, the former high-ranking Justice Department official whom Trump nominated last month, told senators at his confirmation hearing

that he would never let politics get in the way of the bureau’s mission. And he said he “sure as heck” would not offer a pledge of loyalty to the president.

Asserting his independence, he said, “My loyalty is to the Constitution and the rule of law. Those have been my guideposts throughout my career, and I will continue to adhere to them no matter the test.”

Wray’s responses seemed to satisfy both Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee, many of whom signaled their support for him.

Wray, 50, would inherit the FBI at a particularly challenging time given Trump’s abrupt dismissal of James Comey, who was admired within the bureau. Yet the hearing, the first public window into Wray’s views since his selection, was largely devoid of fireworks in keeping with what friends and supporters have described as the nominee’s low-key, disciplined style.

His reserved approach could bode well for the agency at a time when its work has been thrust into the center of a political maelstrom.

After Trump dismissed Comey on May 9, the ex-FBI director said that the president had asked him to pledge his loyalty during a dinner at the White House months earlier. He also said Trump had encouraged him to end an investigation into the former national security adviser, Michael Flynn. Wray said he got no demand for personal loyalty, nor would he pledge it.

Scientists say massive iceberg has broken off in Antarctica

One of the biggest icebergs ever recorded, a trillion-ton behemoth more than seven times the size of New York City, has broken off of Antarctica, triggering disagreement among

scientists over whether global warming is to blame.

The event, captured by satellite, happened sometime in the past few days when the giant chunk snapped off an ice shelf.

While such “calving” of icebergs is not unusual, this is an especially big one. It covers an area of roughly 2,300 square miles, more than twice the size of Luxembourg. Its volume is twice that of Lake Erie, according to Project MIDAS, a research group based in Britain.

It broke loose from the Larsen C ice shelf, which scientists had been monitoring for months as they watched a crack grow more than 120 miles long.

Scientists say global warming has caused a thinning of such shelves, but they differ on whether the latest event can be blamed on climate change.

The iceberg is considered unlikely to pose any threat to shipping. And since the ice was already floating, the breakup won’t raise sea levels in the short term, the project said in a statement.

But it removed more than 10 percent of the ice shelf, and if that eventually hastens the flow of glaciers behind it into the water, there could be a “very modest” rise in sea level, the project said.

Afghan girls will be allowed into U.S. for robotics contest

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials will allow a group of Afghan girls into the country to participate in an international robotics competition after President Donald Trump intervened, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders confirmed Wednesday, ending a saga that had sparked international backlash.

Homeland Security Department spokesman David Lapan said the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services approved a State Department request for

six girls from the war-torn country to be allowed in, along with their chaperone, so they can participate in the competition. The girls’ applications for U.S. visas had been denied twice.

The nonprofit organizing the competition celebrated the reversal in a jubilant statement Wednesday.

The U.S. State Department had declined to comment on why the Afghan team’s visa applications were denied, saying that “all visa applications are adjudicated on a case-by-case basis in accordance with U.S. law.”

Hospital: Jailed Nobel laureate’s condition life threatening

SHENYANG, China (AP) — Imprisoned Chinese Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo’s condition is life threatening with multiple organ failure and his family has opted against inserting a breathing tube needed to keep him alive, the hospital treating him said.

Liu, who has advanced liver cancer, is suffering from respiratory and renal failure as well as septic shock, the First Hospital of China Medical University said on its website Wednesday.

The hospital said doctors informed Liu’s family of the need for a tracheostomy to keep him alive, but they declined. Liu and his family, who are being closely guarded in the hospital, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Liu, China’s most prominent political prisoner, was diagnosed in May after his cancer had entered the final stages and was transferred to the hospital in the northeastern city of Shenyang. He is accompanied by a small group of family members, including his wife, the poet and artist Liu Xia, but is kept out of the sight of supporters and the media.

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