NATION



In this Dec. 2017 file photo, President Donald Trump sits with Attorney General Jeff Sessions in Quantico, Va.

AP Source: Trump had lawyer urge AG against Russia recusal

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Donald Trump directed his White House counsel to tell Attorney General Jeff Sessions to not recuse himself from the Justice Department's investigation into potential ties between Russia and the Trump campaign, according to a person familiar with the matter.

conversation The between Don McGahn, the president's White House counsel, and Sessions took place on the president's orders and occurred just before the attorney general announced that he would step aside from the ongoing into Russian inquiry meddling in the 2016 presidential election, according to a person with knowledge of the interaction. Two other people confirmed details of the conversation between McGahn and Sessions.

All three people spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press to avoid publicly discussing an ongoing investigation.

The episode is known to special counsel Robert Mueller and his team of prosecutors and is likely of interest to them as they look into whether Trump's actions as president, including the May firing of FBI Director James Comey, amount to improper efforts

to obstruct the Russia investigation. Investigators recently concluded а round of interviews with current and former White House officials, including McGahn.

The New York Times first reported that Trump had McGahn lobby Sessions against a recusal.

announced Sessions on March 2 that he would recuse himself from that probe. He said at the time that he should not oversee an investigation into a campaign for which he was an active and vocal supporter, though the recusal also followed the revelation that he had had two previously undisclosed interactions during the 2016 campaign with the Russian ambassador.

But soon before the announcement, McGahn spoke to Sessions by phone and urged him against recusing himself.

During the conversation, according to people familiar with the matter, McGahn argued to Sessions that there was no reason or basis at that time for him to recuse.

ultimately Sessions declined the urging, and McGahn accepted the conclusion of officials who believed that Sessions should recuse himself.

Trump moves to vastly expand offshore drilling

Exploration off Oregon Coast would be permitted

> By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration moved Thursday to vastly expand offshore drilling from the Atlantic to the Arctic oceans with a plan that would open up federal waters off California for the first time in more than three decades.

The new five-year drilling plan also could open new areas of oil and gas exploration in areas off the East Coast from Florida to Maine, where drilling has been blocked for decades. While some lawmakers in those states support offshore drilling, the plan drew immediate opposition from governors up and down the East Coast, including Republican Govs. Rick Scott of Florida and Larry Hogan of Maryland, who pressed President Donald Trump to withdraw their states from consideration.

Democratic governors on both coasts blasted the plan. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo called it "another federal assault on our environment" while West Coast governors Kate Brown (Oregon), Jerry Brown (California) and Jay Inslee (Washington) vowed in a joint statement to block "this reckless, short-sighted action.'

"They've chosen to forget the utter devastation of past offshore oil spills to wildlife and to the fishing, recreation and tourism industries in our states," the governors wrote.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke announced the plan, saying that responsible development of offshore energy resources would boost jobs and economic security while providing billions of dollars to fund conservation along U.S. coastlines.

The five-year plan would open 90 percent of the nation's offshore reserves to development by private companies, Zinke said, with 47 leases proposed off the nation's coastlines from 2019 to 2024. Nineteen sales would be off Alaska, 12 in the Gulf of Mexico, nine in the Atlantic and seven in the Pacific, including six off California.

"This is a draft program," Zinke told reporters during a conference call. "Nothing is final yet, and our department is continuing to engage the American people to get to our final product."

Industry groups praised the announcement, which would be the most expansive offshore drilling proposal in decades. The proposal follows Trump's executive order in April encouraging more drilling rights in federal waters,



AP Photo/Mark J Terrill File

In this 2010 file photo, pelicans float on the water with an offshore oil platform in the background in the Santa Barbara Channel off the coast of Santa Barbara, Calif.

part of the administration's strategy to help the U.S. achieve "energy dominance" in the global market.

"To kick off a national discussion, you need a national plan — something that has been lacking the past several years," said Randall Luthi, president of the National Ocean Industries Association. President Barack Obama blocked Atlantic and Pacific drilling under a five-year plan finalized in 2016.

A coalition of more than 60 environmental groups denounced the plan, saying it would impose "severe and unacceptable harm" to America's oceans, coastal economies, public health and marine life

"These ocean waters are not President Trump's personal playground. They belong to all Americans and the public wants them preserved and protected, not sold off to multinational oil companies," read the coalition's statement, which was signed by leaders of the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, League of Conservation Voters and other environmental groups.

The proposal comes less than a week after the Trump administration proposed to rewrite or kill rules on offshore oil and gas drilling imposed after the 2010 rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico. The accident on BP's Deepwater Horizon rig killed 11 workers and triggered the biggest offshore oil spill in U.S. history.

The Trump administration called the rules an unnecessary burden on industry and said rolling them back will encourage more energy production. Environmentalists said Trump was raising the risk of more deadly oil spills.

The Obama administration imposed tougher rules in response to the BP spill. The rules targeted blowout preventers, massive valve-like devices designed to prevent spills from wells on the ocean floor. The preventer used by BP failed. The rules require more frequent inspections of those and other devices and dictate that experts onshore monitor drilling of highly complex wells in real time.

The Gulf of Mexico is still recovering from the BP spill, said Diane Hoskins, campaign director for the marine conservation group Oceana.

"Americans have seen the devastation that comes from offshore drilling,' she said. "Will we allow Florida's white beaches or the popular and pristine Outer Banks to share a similar fate? What about the scenic Pacific coast or even remote Arctic waters?"

Zinke's announcement "ignores widespread and bipartisan opposition to offshore drilling," including from more than 150 municipalities nationwide and 1,200 local, state and federal officials, Hoskins said.

Scott, the Florida governor, said he has asked for an immediate meeting with Zinke to discuss his concerns. "My top priority is to ensure that Florida's natural resources are protected," Scott said. Hogan, of Maryland, said he would oppose the plan "to the fullest

extent that is legally possible." California was the site of the first offshore drilling in the U.S. more than 120 years ago, but the region was tarnished by one of the worst spills in U.S. history in 1969, when more than 3 million gallons of oil poured into the ocean near Santa Barbara.

Thousands of sea birds were killed, along with dolphins, elephant seals and sea lions. Virtually all commercial fishing near Santa Barbara was halted, and tourism dropped dramatically.

Public outrage generated by the spill helped spark the modern environmental movement, and no federal leases have been granted off the California coast since 1984.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON & EVENING

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