Judge agrees to delay Stormy Daniels' lawsuit against Trump

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A judge on Friday delayed a civil lawsuit by porn actress Stormy Daniels against President Donald Trump and his personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, citing a criminal investigation the attorney is facing.

U.S. District Judge S. James Otero agreed to put the case on hold for three months and set a hearing for July 27.

Cohen asked for a delay after FBI agents raided his home and office earlier this month. The FBI was seeking records about a nondisclosure agreement Daniels signed days before the 2016 presidential election.

Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, has said she had an affair with Trump in 2006 and sued to dissolve a confidentiality agreement that prevents her from discussing it. She's also suing Cohen, alleging defamation.

Cohen's attorney said in court last week that because the criminal investigation overlaps with issues in the lawsuit, his client's right against self-incrimination could be adversely impacted because he won't be able to respond and defend himself.

Otero agreed, ruling that "there is a large potential factual overlap between the civil and criminal proceedings that would heavily implicate Mr. Cohen's Fifth Amendment rights."

Daniels' attorney, Michael Avenatti, tweeted that he'd likely be filing an immediate appeal of Otero's ruling with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

"We do not agree with it," Avenatti wrote. "Justice delayed is justice denied."

While Otero agreed with Avenatti that Cohen's argument for delay was made weaker without an indictment being filed against him, "the significance of the FBI raid can't be understated."

"This is no simple criminal investigation," Otero wrote. "It is an investigation into the personal attorney of a sitting president regarding documents that might be subject to the attorney-client privilege."

He continued to say that "whether or not an indictment is forthcoming, and the court thinks it is likely based on these facts alone, these unique circumstances counsel in favor of stay."

Cohen said in court records that FBI agents had seized his electronic devices and documents that contain information about the $130,000 Daniels was paid as part of the agreement.

AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

President Donald Trump with German Chancellor Angela Merkel speaks during a news conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Friday.

Trump, Merkel cordial, but no apparent movement on Iran

By JONATHAN LEMIRE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Facing imminent deadlines, President Donald Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel largely papered over their differences on trade and the Iran nuclear accord on Friday, stressing instead ties between the longtime allies and their shared goal of a nuclear-free North Korea.

Still, Merkel's brief visit, coupled with French President Emmanuel Macron's more lavish stopover earlier in the week, made clear that the U.S. president's divisions with European allies remain substantial.

Trump and Merkel's three-hour visit at the White House contained little of the back-slapping geniality that defined Macron's three-day trip, including a lavish state dinner. While Trump and Macron complimented and embraced each other, the German chancellor kept her public statements brief and handshakes formal.

Trump is widely expected to withdraw the U.S. from the international Iran agreement next month, despite pleas from Macron earlier in the week and Merkel on Friday. Yet Merkel used her public comments after her meeting with Trump to try to gloss over that disagreement, calling the Obama-era accord a "first step" toward curtailing and containing Iran's regional ambitions and suggesting openness to a side agreement.

Trump has said he, too, is open to new negotiations with Iran. But he has not said he will heed European calls for the U.S. to stay in the deal, which aims to restrict Iran's nuclear efforts, while any further talks are underway. His decision on whether to exit the deal is expected by May 12 and he forcefully set out what he sees as the ultimate goal.

"They're not going to be doing nuclear weapons. You can bank on it," Trump declared.

On trade, Merkel saw little progress on obtaining permanent exemptions for the European Union from Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs, even as a May 1 decision deadline approaches.

"The decision lies with the president," she said.

German officials had signaled that their goals for Friday's visit were modest,

Trump implicitly scolded Germany for not meeting NATO military spending obligations, saying it is "essential that our NATO allies increase their financial contribution." Merkel said Germany's latest budget will take defense spending to 1.3 percent of GDP and the country is aiming for more over time. NATO countries are expected to devote 2 percent of their gross domestic product to defense.

Merkel made a point of flattering Trump on one issue, declaring that the U.S. pressure campaign against North Korea deserved the lion's share of the credit for the historic summit between the leaders of North and South Korea. Trump praised Germany's role in the effort but agreed with a reporter's question that he would be "the closer" in the deal, saying "I think I have a responsibility" to oversee denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

While Merkel kept her answers brief, Trump expounded at length on subjects ranging the strength of the U.S. economy under to the failings of his predecessors in the Oval Office.

White House: Records dispute allegations against Jackson

By JILL COLVIN and ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House said Friday that internal records raise doubt about some of the most serious allegations leveled against White House doctor Ronny Jackson in his failed bid to become the next secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Jackson

Jackson withdrew his nomination Thursday after allegations by current and former colleagues raised questions about his prescribing practices and leadership ability, including accusations of drunkenness on the job. Democratic Sen. Jon Tester's office collected the allegations, which included a claim that Jackson "got drunk and wrecked a government vehicle" at a Secret Service going-away party.

The records, including police reports, show Jackson was in three minor vehicle incidents in government vehicles during the last five years, but none involved the use of alcohol and he was not found to be at fault. In one case, a side-view mirror was clipped by a passing truck. In another incident an enraged driver in Montgomery County, Maryland, allegedly punched out Jackson's window during a morning drive to Camp David.

The White House medical unit that Jackson ran successfully passed regular controlled substance audits, according to the records for the last three years. The reviews did recommend improvements to the medical unit's handling of controlled substances, but did not find misconduct.

The Associated Press reviewed the documents Friday. They were the result of an internal White House review of allegations raised against Jackson during his brief confirmation process. The White House says the records, covering recent years, disprove the allegations.

But Tester's office has not specified the time frame during which the alleged misconduct occurred. Tester spokeswoman Marnee Banks said the office would not comment until it knew more about the White House records.

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