Rep. Mike Conaway, R-Texas, left, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, and Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee speak after closed meeting in Washington.
AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File

GOP-led panel finds no collusion, but poor judgment by campaign

Trump celebrates, Democrats cite poor investigation

By TOM LOBIANCO and CHAD DAY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Republican-led House intelligence committee on Friday released a lengthy report concluding it found no evidence that Donald Trump's campaign colluded with Russia in the 2016 presidential campaign, drawing praise from the president and rebuttals from Democrats.

The report caps an investigation that began with the promise of bipartisanship but quickly transformed into an acrimonious battle between Democrats and Republicans over Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and whether there were any connections with the Trump campaign.

Trump quickly claimed vindication Friday, calling the report "totally conclusive, strong, powerful, many things."

"No collusion, which I knew anyway. No coordination, no nothing. It's a witch hunt, that's all it is," he told reporters in the Oval Office.

But the committee's Republicans didn't let the Trump campaign completely off the hook. They specifically cited the Trump campaign for "poor judgment" in taking a June 2016 meeting in Trump Tower that was described in emails to Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., as part of a Russian government effort to aide his father's presidential bid. The report also dubbed the campaign's praise of WikiLeaks "objectionable."

"While the committee found no evidence that the Trump campaign colluded, coordinated, or conspired with the Russian government, the investigation did find poor judgment and ill-considered actions by the Trump and Clinton campaigns," the House intelligence committee wrote.

The House investigation is the first of several inquiries probing Russian election interference to conclude. A separate investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller continues, as do probes led by the Senate intelligence and judiciary committees.

In a Friday night tweet, Trump repeated his "witch hunt" claim and wrote, "There should never have been a Special Counsel appointed."

The House report's conclusion on collusion is fiercely opposed by committee Democrats, who accused their Republican colleagues of playing "defense counsel" for the White House throughout the investigation.

"Committee Republicans chose not to seriously investigate — or even see, when in plain sight — evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia," Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the committee, said in a statement. Schiff cited several "secret meetings and communication" between people linked to Russia and Trump campaign officials, including Trump Jr. and former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

Schiff called on the committee to publicly release the transcripts from dozens of interviews with key witnesses, saying the public should be able to judge the evidence gathered by the committee. Democrats also released a 98-page rebuttal .

Rep. Mike Conaway, R-Texas, meanwhile called on intelligence officials to clear the committee to release more information from the report that was deemed classified. The 253-page document is packed with details and assessments, but is also spackled with redacted names and blacked-out passages.

LIFEWAYS: The organization's contract with schools ends June 8

Continued from 1A

happens in its Pendleton and Hermiston clinics. All around the 3,200-square-mile county, about 150 Lifeways employees work in schools, jails and residential treatment centers.

The organization operates like an octopus with a slew of tentacles, each with a different function. Prevention is one mission. Therapists work with inmates to help them develop mental health strategies and stay out of jail. Inside the clinics, therapists help clients deal with an array of mental health issues. Others at Lifeways assess people experiencing mental health crises out in the community, on the street or wherever they are. Law enforcement officers often need to request psychological assessments for people they encounter.

Lifeways crisis workers are located on both east and west sides of the county, 24 hours a day, according to Micaela Cathey, Lifeways' executive director for Umatilla County.

Recently the agency found itself defending its crisis response program after receiving criticism from law enforcement agencies and also from Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc., which contracts Lifeways' services to provide mental health care for the county's OHP patients.

New boss

New Lifeways CEO Tim Hoekstra barely had time to move into his Ontario office in January before trouble came knocking. That week, the agency got an ultimatum: Make key changes by Feb. 20 or lose the contract for crisis services in Umatilla County.

The demand came from the GOBHI board. Pendleton and Hermiston police chiefs and others criticized Lifeways for leaving it up to law enforcement officers to de-escalate mental crises encountered on the streets. Often, they said, people in crisis end up in jail or back on the streets without receiving adequate treatment. They also protested that Lifeways often won't deal with people in mental crisis who are also intoxicated.

So the public welcome in Umatilla County wasn't especially warm. Hoekstra hit the ground running hard to find a way back into the good graces of GOBHI.

The California native has going on 29 years in the mental health field. After high school, he worked with at-risk youth and then switched to crisis services. His resume includes a psychology degree (and minors in religious studies, business and music), a graduate degree in applied psychology and an MBA. Professionally he has an array of experience from psychotherapy and substance abuse treatment to establishing drug court protocols and serving as a mental health examiner for the State of Idaho. Most recently, he was director of outpatient behavioral health services for the Lourdes Health Network in Pasco.

Hoekstra got to work. He and Cathey met with Campbell, chiefs of the county's police departments and health professionals in February to discuss improvements. Hoekstra suggested the idea of hiring an outside consultant and since engaged Paul Flanders, formerly of Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness. The agency also bumped up staffing.

In addition, Hoekstra moved Cathey to a newly created position of executive director.

"I recognized we didn't have a senior executive in Umatilla County with boots on the ground, empowered to make realtime decisions and remove some of the bottlenecks for the organization," Hoekstra said. "That person would be empowered to take the lead in working with community partners."

Umatilla County focus

Cathey began meeting regularly with a core group of community partners such as police, jail staff and health workers. Together, they are systematically hashing out the stickiest issues.

"They are taking bites at a time," she said.

Cathey started working for Lifeways five years ago as an intern in Malheur County and worked her way up. She came to Umatilla County three years ago.

Many are watching closely, GOBHI CEO Kevin Campbell being one.

"I continue to be cautiously optimistic," he said. "They've made significant changes. Our goal isn't to put them out of business. At the same time, we'll look at their range of services to make sure we're getting our money's worth."

A setback happened this month when crisis program manager Skye Schilling resigned, reportedly to work closer to her home in Tri-Cities. A search is on for her replacement. Members of the core committee will participate in the interviewing process.

Also, Lifeways is narrowing its focus. The organization's contract to provide school-based services ends on June 8 and it doesn't plan to apply for the new contract.

"It was taking a look at the services, taking a look at the providers and determining what was in the best interest of the schools and children," Cathey said. "We want to support county services and want to be able to enhance the therapeutic services that are more in our wheelhouse."

She and Hoekstra are keeping their eye on the crisis services ball.

"We've made progress in terms of communication," she said. "There's always room for continued improvement. Relationships are being developed. I think there's a minimal level of trust, but I think, as with any group process, you have to go through stages and adjustments and those have to continue to be built."

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