

Trump lawyer sold ‘insight’ into his client

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Already under investigation for a payment to a porn star, President Donald Trump’s longtime personal attorney is facing intensifying legal and ethical scrutiny for selling his Trump World experience and views at a hefty price to companies that sought “insight” into the new president.

One company, pharmaceutical giant Novartis, acknowledged Wednesday it paid Michael Cohen \$1.2 million for services, though they ended after a single meeting. Others, including some with major regulatory matters before the new administration, acknowl-

edged payments totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars over at least several months.

The corporate ties could suggest Cohen was peddling his influence and profiting from his relationship with the president. They also raise questions about whether Trump knew about the arrangement.

Cohen’s corporate ties were first revealed in a detailed report released by an attorney for pornographic film actress Stormy Daniels. The report alleged that Cohen used a company he established weeks before the 2016 election to receive the payments

from a variety of businesses — including \$500,000 from one associated with a Russian billionaire. Financial documents reviewed by the Associated Press appear to back up much of attorney Michael Avenatti’s report.

Cohen’s lawyers said late Wednesday that much of the information released by Avenatti was “completely inaccurate.” They told a New York judge that Avenatti made statements “in an apparent attempt to prejudice and discredit Mr. Cohen” as he seeks to intervene in a civil case Cohen brought stemming from April 9 raids on

his home and office. The raids were carried out by federal agents looking for evidence in a criminal probe.

The lawyers wrote that some of the information Avenatti published Tuesday did appear to come from Cohen’s actual bank records.

Aventti responded on Twitter, saying the attorneys “fail to address, let alone contradict, 99% of the statements in what we released. Among other things, they effectively concede the receipt of the \$500,000 from those with Russian ties.”

Three companies confirmed the payments, including Novartis and AT&T, both saying Cohen’s Essential Consultants was hired to help them understand

the new president during the early days of the Trump administration. Novartis said in a statement that it paid Cohen \$100,000 a month for a year-long contract, thinking the longtime New York legal “fixer” with few Washington ties could advise on health care matters. After a single meeting they decided “not to engage further.”

Some of the companies that engaged Cohen also had contact with Trump personally. AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson met with him during the transition and has visited the White House as the company has sought approval to absorb Time Warner. The current CEO of Novartis attended

a dinner with Trump at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, this year, though the company stressed that the agreement with Cohen’s company predated his time as CEO and he was not involved with the deal.

Just what Cohen was selling was a key question Wednesday, particularly given that public records show he is not a registered lobbyist. Cohen could enter these relationships without violating federal lobbying laws if he did not seek to influence Trump on the companies’ behalf. But hiring Trump’s personal attorney for advice on how to understand the president would be highly unusual.



Michael Cohen

Americans were freed hour before flight out of Pyongyang

Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea — After months of anticipation and drama, the release of three American detainees by North Korea played out amid high-stakes diplomacy and was only sealed about an hour before the U.S. secretary of state was wheels-up from Pyongyang.

The three men, Kim Dong Chul, Kim Hak Song and Tony Kim, walked on their own from a van and onto the plane of top diplomat Mike Pompeo. It was the culmination of Pompeo’s 12-and-half-hour visit to the North Korean capital, which included a 90-minute meeting with leader Kim Jong Un.

Returning to his hotel from that meeting, Pompeo had given reporters a fingers-crossed sign when asked if there was good news about the detainees. A North Korean official came to the hotel shortly after to inform Pompeo that Kim had granted amnesties to the three and that they would be released at 7 p.m. local time, according to a senior U.S. official present for the exchange. Carl Risch, the assistant secretary of state for consular affairs, and a doctor went to another hotel to pick up the men and bring them to the airport, the offi-



AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko

A U.S. government plane lands at Yokota U.S. Airbase on outskirts of Tokyo. Three Americans detained in North Korea for more than a year were on their way back to the U.S. with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

cial said.

They finally left custody at 7:45 p.m., and by 8:42 p.m. they were flying home.

As soon as the plane cleared North Korean airspace, Pompeo called President Donald Trump to inform him of the releases with the men all apparently in good health; then other officials notified their families.

Even before Pompeo’s plane had touched down for a stopover at Yokota Air Base in neighboring Japan, the president announced to the world by Twitter that the “3 wonderful gentlemen” were free.

They are the latest in a series of Americans to be

held in North Korea for alleged anti-state activities in recent years, only to be freed during the visit of a high-level U.S. official or statesman. Their releases draw a line under an issue that had weighed on plans for a historic summit between Kim and Trump that will focus on North Korea’s nuclear weapons.

“We’re granting amnesty to the three detained Americans,” the North Korean emissary told Pompeo at Pyongyang’s Koryo Hotel, according to the senior U.S. official who requested anonymity to discuss the exchange. “We issued the order to grant immediate amnesty to the detainees.”

Israel accuses Iranian forces of rocket attack on Golan

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Iranian forces based in Syria fired 20 rockets at Israeli front-line military positions in the Golan Heights early Thursday, the Israeli military said, triggering an Israeli reprisal and further escalating heightened tensions.

The Israeli military said its Iron Dome rocket defense system intercepted some of the incoming projectiles, while others caused only minimal damage. There were no Israeli casualties.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman, said Iran’s Al Quds force fired the rockets at several Israeli bases, though he would not say how Israel determined the Iranian involvement. The incoming attack set off air raid sirens in the Israeli-controlled Golan, which was captured from Syria in the 1967 war.

Israel “views this Ira-



SANA via AP

This photo released on Wednesday by the Syrian official news agency SANA shows flames rising after an attack in an area known to have numerous Syrian army military bases, in Kisweh, south of Damascus, Syria.

nian attack very severely,” Conricus told reporters. He said Israel had responded, but did not provide details.

“This event is not over,” he said.

Syria’s state media said Syrian air defenses had intercepted “hostile Israeli missiles” early Thursday that were fired over southwestern Damascus. There were further reports of Syrian defenses engaging Israeli rockets three hours later.

Syrian media earlier said the hostilities began with Israeli fire at Syrian positions in southern Syria from across the border. Pro-Syrian media said Syrian missiles then fired at Israeli forces. One TV station, Beirut-based Al-Mayadeen, said at least 50 missiles were fired from Syria at Israeli forces in the Golan Heights. State-run Al-Ikhbariya TV said missiles targeted 10 Israeli positions.

BRIEFLY

Explosive event possible at Hawaii volcano

PAHOA, Hawaii (AP) — Geologists warned Wednesday that Hawaii’s Kilauea volcano could erupt explosively and send boulders, rocks and ash into the air around its summit in the coming weeks.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the risk will rise if the lava drops below the groundwater level beneath the summit’s caldera.

An influx of water inside could cause steam-driven explosions. There’s also potential for ash, steam and sulfur dioxide emissions.

Kilauea is one of the world’s most active volcanoes.

It has destroyed 36 structures since it began releasing lava into fissures that opened in a Big Island residential neighborhood last week.

Since the eruptions began, 14 such fissures have opened in a subdivision and destroyed dozens of structures, including 26 homes.

In the weeks ahead, the volcano could eject blocks up to two yards in diameter a little less than a mile away, the USGS said. It may also send pebbles shooting into the air several miles away, the USGS said.

Mexico, 2 U.S. states could see Colorado River cutback

DENVER (AP) — Mexico and the U.S. states of Arizona and Nevada face a better-than-even possibility of getting less water from the Colorado River in 2020 because of a persistent drought, water managers said Wednesday.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which manages the river, released projections showing a 52 percent chance the river’s biggest reservoir, Lake Mead in Arizona and Nevada, will fall low enough in 2020 to trigger cutbacks under agreements governing the system.

If that happens, those two states and Mexico would be the first see their share

of water cut. Further drops in the reservoir could trigger cuts for other states.

The chances of a shortfall rise to 64 percent in 2021 and 68 percent in 2022, the bureau said.

Lake Mead has never fallen low enough to trigger cutbacks, but a nearly two-decade drought and growing demand makes a shortage more and more likely.

The river serves about 40 million people and 6,300 square miles of farmland in United States and Mexico. In the U.S., Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Wyoming and Utah all use the river or its tributaries, along with 20 Native American reservations.

CIA nominee says torture doesn’t work in interrogation

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump’s CIA nominee said Wednesday at her confirmation hearing that she doesn’t believe torture works as an interrogation technique and that her “strong moral compass” would prevent her from carrying out any presidential order she found objectionable.

Under questioning by members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, acting CIA Director Gina Haspel said she would not permit the spy agency to restart the kind of harsh detention and interrogation program it ran at black sites after Sept. 11. It was one of the darkest chapters of the CIA’s history and tainted America’s image worldwide.

Senators asked how she would respond if Trump — who has said he supports harsh interrogation techniques like waterboarding and “a hell of a lot worse” — ordered her to do something she found morally objectionable.

“I would not allow CIA to undertake activity that I thought was immoral, even if it was technically legal,” said Haspel, a 33-year veteran of the agency. “I would absolutely not permit it.”

She faces what will likely be a close confirmation vote in the full Senate. Haspel would be the first female CIA director.

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