

White House stung by Cohen accusation, Trump fires back

By ZEKE MILLER, CATHERINE LUCEY AND KEN THOMAS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump accused his former lawyer Michael Cohen of lying under pressure of prosecution Wednesday as his White House grappled with allegations that the president had orchestrated a campaign cover-up to buy the silence of two women who claimed he had affairs with them.

Confronting mounting legal and political threats, Trump took to Twitter to accuse Cohen of making up “stories in order to get a ‘deal’” from federal prosecutors. Cohen pleaded guilty Tuesday to eight charges, including campaign finance violations that he said he carried out in coordination with Trump. Behind closed doors, Trump expressed worry and frustration that a man intimately familiar with his political, personal and business dealings for more than a decade had turned on him.

Yet his White House signaled no clear strategy for managing the fallout. At a White House briefing, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders insisted at least seven times that Trump had done nothing wrong and was not the subject of criminal charges. She referred substantive questions to the president’s personal counsel Rudy Giuliani, who was at a golf course in Scotland. Outside allies of the White House said they had received little guidance on how to respond to the events in their appearances on cable news. And it was not clear the West Wing was assembling any kind of coordinated response.

Trump himself publicly denied wrongdoing, sitting down with his favored program “Fox & Friends” for an interview set to air Thursday. In the interview, he argued, incorrectly, that the hush-money payouts weren’t “even a campaign violation” because he subsequently reimbursed Cohen for the payments personally instead of with campaign funds. Federal law restricts how much individuals can donate to a campaign, bars corporations from making direct contributions and requires the dis-



AP Photo/Tyler Evert
President Donald Trump speaks during a rally Tuesday, Aug. 21, 2018, at the Civic Center in Charleston, W.Va.



AP Photo/Mary Altaffer
Michael Cohen leaves Federal court, Tuesday, Aug. 21, 2018, in New York. Cohen has pleaded guilty to multiple charges.

closure of transactions.

Cohen had said Tuesday he secretly used shell companies to make payments used to silence former Playboy model Karen McDougal and adult-film actress Stormy Daniels for the purpose of influencing the 2016 election.

Trump has insisted that he only found out about the payments after they were made, despite the release of a September 2016 taped conversation in which Trump and Cohen can be heard discussing a deal to pay McDougal for her story of a 2006 affair she says she had with Trump.

The White House denied the president had lied, with Sanders calling the assertion “ridiculous.” Yet she offered no explanation for Trump’s shifting accounts.

As Trump vented his frustration, White House aides sought to project a sense of calm. Used to the ever-present shadow of federal investigations, numbed West Wing staffers absorbed near-simultaneous announcements Tuesday of the Cohen plea deal and the conviction of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort on financial charges.

Manafort faces trial on separate charges in September in the District of Columbia that include acting as a foreign agent.

That Cohen was in trouble was no surprise — federal prosecutors raided his offices months ago — but Trump and his allies were caught off-guard when he also pleaded guilty to campaign finance crimes, which, for the first time, took the swirling criminal probes directly to the president.

Both cases resulted, at least in part, from the work of special counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating Russia’s attempts to sway voters in the 2016 election.

“The only thing that I have done wrong,” Trump tweeted late Wednesday, “is to win an election that was expected to be won by Crooked Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. The problem is, they forgot to campaign in numerous states!”

Meanwhile, Cohen’s lawyer, Lanny Davis, said Wednesday that Cohen has information “that would be of interest” to the special counsel.

Both parties quiet on impeachment

WASHINGTON (AP) — The day after President Donald Trump was implicated in a federal crime, members of both parties dismissed talk of impeachment, with some Democrats expressing fears Wednesday about such a politically risky step, and Republicans shrugging off the accusations or withholding judgment.

The legal entanglements surrounding Trump — the guilty plea by former lawyer Michael Cohen and the fraud conviction of one-time campaign chairman Paul Manafort — delivered a one-two punch that left lawmakers struggling for an appropriate response ahead of the midterm campaigns.

Trump’s strongest supporters echoed his “no collusion” retorts, suggesting that, absent any evidence that he worked with Russia to influence the 2016 election, there is just no high-crimes-and-misdemeanors case for impeachment.

Democrats, meanwhile, are trying to tamp down expectations from their liberal base of taking on the president for fear that impeachment talk will cause GOP voters to rally around Trump in November.

The dynamic underscored the political difficulty of impeachment proceedings on Capitol Hill, especially for Republicans who have been reluctant to criticize the president but now face a new chapter in what has been a difficult relationship.

In pleading guilty to campaign-finance violations and other crimes Tuesday, Cohen said Trump directed a hush-money scheme before the 2016 election to buy the silence of porn star Stormy Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal, both of whom said they had sexual relationships with Trump. Trump has accused Cohen of making up “stories in order to get a ‘deal’” from federal prosecutors.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell brushed past reporters Wednesday with-

out answering questions about Cohen or the possibility that the lawyer’s accusations about an illegal campaign cover-up are grounds for impeachment proceedings. GOP House Speaker Paul Ryan, who is away from Washington, had no direct response. An aide said he needs more information.

Other Republicans, though, filled the gaps. “No collusion=no impeachment,” tweeted the influential radio host Hugh Hewitt, setting the day’s tone.

He explained that impeachment is a political and legal term of art and said there needs to be a tipping point in public opinion that would push Congress to act. It’s not there yet, he tweeted.

Doug Deason, a Texas-based donor and major Trump supporter, said voters simply don’t care that Trump behaves badly at times and has associated with people who broke the law.

“In no way, shape or form did we think we were hiring St. Trump to repair the morals of the country,” he said.

Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of Liberty University and a Trump confidant, said: “Anything short of the campaign actually conspiring with Russia to try to impact the election, anything short of that will just be background noise.”

Even those few Republicans who have been willing to speak out about Trump are treading carefully in the wake of Cohen’s guilty plea.

“I don’t think I’ve witnessed anything like I’ve witnessed over the last year and a half. Probably, the American people haven’t in modern times,” said retiring Republican Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee. But he stopped short of passing further judgment on the Cohen case.

“I’m sure there’s going to be other revelations that come up,” he said, “and I think we ought to just let the process work.”

With no place to run, people in Hawaii brace for hurricane

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER
Associated Press

HONOLULU — Hawaii residents emptied store shelves Wednesday, claimed the last sheets of plywood to board up windows and drained gas pumps as Hurricane Lane churned toward the state.

The category 4 storm could slam into the islands Thursday with winds exceeding 100 mph, making it the most powerful storm to hit Hawaii since Hurricane Iniki in 1992.

Unlike Florida or Texas, where residents can get in their cars and drive hundreds of miles to safety, people in Hawaii are confined to the islands and can’t outrun the powerful winds and driving rain.

Instead, they must stay put and make sure they have enough supplies to outlast prolonged power outages and other potential emergencies.

“Everyone is starting to buckle down at this point,” said Christyl Nagao of Kauai. “Our families are here. We have businesses and this and that. You just have to man your fort and hold on tight.”

Living in an isolated island state also means the possibility that essential goods can’t be shipped to Hawaii if the storm shuts down ports.

“You’re stuck here and resources might not get here in time,” Nagao said.

The National Weather Service said Lane is expected to make a gradual turn toward the northwest Wednesday, followed by a more northward motion into the islands on Thursday.

“The center of Lane will move very close to or over the main Hawaiian Islands from Thursday through Saturday,” the weather service



AP Photo/Caleb Jones
Loren, right, and Ruby Aquino, of Honolulu, load water into their car ahead of Hurricane Lane, Wednesday in Honolulu.

said. Public schools were closed for the rest of the week and local government workers were told to stay home unless they’re essential employees.

Shelters were being readied to open on Oahu, Maui, Molokai and Lanai. Officials said they would open shelters on other islands when needed. Officials were also working to help Hawaii’s sizeable homeless population, many of whom live near beaches and streams that could flood.

Hawaii Emergency Management Agency Administrator Tom Travis said there’s not enough shelter space statewide. He advised those who are not in flood zones to stay home.

Many residents were trying to reinforce older homes made with single-wall construction.

“We’re planning on boarding up all our windows and sliding doors,” Napua Puaoi of Wailuku, Maui, said after buying 16 pieces of plywood from Home Depot. “As soon as my husband comes home — he has all the power tools.”

Melanie Davis, who lives in a suburb outside Honolulu, said she was

gathering canned food and baby formula.

“We’re getting some bags of rice and of course, some Spam,” she said of the canned lunch meat that’s popular in Hawaii.

She was organizing important documents into a folder — birth and marriage certificates, Social Security cards, insurance paperwork — and making sure her three children, all under 4, have flotation devices such as swimming vests — “just in case.”

Meteorologist Chevy Chevalier said Lane may drop to a Category 3 by Thursday afternoon but that would still be a major hurricane.

“We expect it to gradually weaken as it gets closer to the islands,” Chevalier said. “That being said, on our current forecast, as of the afternoon on Thursday, we still have it as a major hurricane.”

Puaoi said Home Depot opened at 6 a.m., and employees reported there was already a line around the building.

“We are fully stocked,” she said. “We have about nine cases of water because we’re having family stay with us as well, so one case per person.”

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