

# Trump's ex-lawyer slams him before Congress

Cohen calls president a 'racist' and a 'con man'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, ERIC TUCKER AND MICHAEL R. SISAK  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a damning depiction of Donald Trump, the president's former lawyer on Wednesday cast him as a racist and a con man who used his inner circle to cover up politically damaging allegations about sex, and lied throughout the 2016 election campaign about his business interests in Russia.

Michael Cohen, who previously pleaded guilty to lying to Congress, told lawmakers that Trump had advance knowledge and embraced the news that emails damaging to Hillary Clinton would be released during the campaign. But he also said he had no "direct evidence" that Trump or his aides colluded with Russia to get him elected, the primary question of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation.

Cohen, shaking off incessant criticism from Republicans anxious to paint him as a felon and liar, became the first Trump insider to pull back the curtain on a version of the inner workings of Trump's political and business operations. He likened the president to a "mobster" who demanded blind loyalty from underlings and expected them to lie on his behalf to conceal information and protect him — even if it meant breaking the law.

"I am not protecting Mr. Trump anymore," Cohen declared.

His matter-of-fact testimony about secret payments and lies unfolded as Trump met with North



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

**Michael Cohen, President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer, is sworn in to testify before the House Oversight and Reform Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday.**

Korean leader Kim Jong Un, offering stark TV counterprogramming to the president's official duties. At a Vietnam hotel and unable to ignore the drama thousands of miles away, Trump lashed out on Twitter, saying Cohen "did bad things unrelated to Trump" and "is lying in order to reduce his prison time."

In testimony that cut to the heart of federal investigations encircling the White House, Cohen said he arranged hush money payments to women on Trump's behalf and lied about them to the public and the first lady at the president's behest. He agreed to say Trump was "not knowledgeable" about the transactions even though the president directly reimbursed him, and said he was left with the unmistakable impression Trump wanted him to lie to Congress about a Moscow real estate project, even if the president never directly told him so.

In one revelation, Cohen said prosecutors in New York were investigating conversations Trump or his advisers had with him after his office and hotel room was raided by the FBI last April. Cohen said he could

not discuss that conversation, the last contact he said he has had with the president or anyone acting on his behalf, because it remains under investigation.

The appearance marked the latest step in Cohen's evolution from legal fixer for the president — he once boasted he'd "take a bullet" for Trump — to a foe who has implicated him in federal campaign finance violations. The hearing proceeded along parallel tracks, with Democrats focusing on allegations against Trump while Republicans sought to undermine Cohen's credibility and the proceeding itself.

As Republicans blasted him as a convicted liar, a mostly unrattled Cohen sought to blunt the attacks by repeatedly acknowledging his own failings. He called himself a "fool," warned lawmakers of the perils of blind loyalty to a leader undeserving of it and pronounced himself ashamed of what he'd done to protect Trump.

"You make mistakes in life and I've owned them, and I've taken responsibility for them, and I'm paying a huge price, as is my fam-

ily," Cohen said during testimony that spanned roughly seven hours.

Cohen will soon report to prison for a three-year sentence. At the same time, he is seen as a vital witness for federal prosecutors because of his proximity to the president during key episodes under investigation and their decade-long professional relationship.

The first of six Trump aides charged in the Trump-Russia investigation to testify publicly about crimes committed during the 2016 campaign and in the months that followed, Cohen also delivered biting personal commentary on a president he said never expected to win in the first place.

He recalled how Trump made him threaten schools he attended to not release his grades and SAT scores, mocked his own avoidance of the Vietnam War and denigrated blacks as "too stupid" to vote for him.

"He never expected to win the primary. He never expected to win the general election," Cohen said. "The campaign — for him — was always a marketing opportunity."

Cohen gave lawmakers his first-person account of how he arranged to buy the silence of a porn actress and a Playboy model who said they had sex with Trump. He described a February 2017 conversation with Trump in the Oval Office in which the president reassured him that reimbursement checks sent through Federal Express were coming but would take some time to get through the White House system.

He said the president called him a year later to discuss the public messaging around the payments, and had even once put his wife, Melania, on the phone so that he could disavow

knowledge.

"Lying to the first lady is one of my biggest regrets," Cohen said. "She is a kind, good person. I respect her greatly, and she did not deserve that."

In an allegation relating to Mueller's probe, Cohen said he said he overheard Trump confidant Roger Stone telling the candidate in the summer of 2016 that WikiLeaks would dump damaging information about Clinton.

Trump put Stone on speakerphone and Stone told him that he had communicated with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and that "within a couple of days, there would be a massive dump of emails that would damage Hillary Clinton's campaign," according to Cohen. Damaging emails that U.S. officials say were hacked by Russia were later released by WikiLeaks.

Trump responded by saying "wouldn't that be great," Cohen said.

Stone disputed that account Wednesday.

Cohen's claims that Trump had advance knowledge of the emails contradict the president's assertions that he was in the dark, and it is not clear how legally problematic that could be for Trump anyway. Mueller has not suggested that mere awareness of WikiLeaks' plans, as Stone is purported to have had, is by itself a crime.

Cohen also suggested Trump implicitly told him to lie about a Moscow real estate project. Cohen has admitted lying about the project, which he says Trump knew about as Cohen was negotiating with Russia during the campaign. Cohen said Trump did not directly tell him to lie, but "he would look me in the eye and tell me there's no business in Russia and then go out and

lie to the American people by saying the same thing."

Cohen said he does not have direct evidence that Trump colluded with the Russian government during the election, but that he has "suspicions," including after a June 2016 meeting between the president's oldest son and a Kremlin-connected lawyer.

"I wouldn't use the word 'colluding.' Was there something odd about the back-and-forth praise with President Putin?" Cohen said. "Yes, but I'm not really sure I can answer the question about collusion."

Federal prosecutors in New York have said Trump directed Cohen to arrange payments to buy the silence of porn actress Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal in the run-up to the 2016 campaign. Cohen has said he acted out of "blind loyalty."

He said he was presenting the committee with a copy of a check Trump wrote from his personal bank account after he became president to reimburse Cohen for the hush money payments. He claimed he had other exhibits as well, including some financial statements.

On the matter of racism, Cohen said the president made comments "disparaging African-Americans, saying at one point that black people would never vote for him because they were 'too stupid.'"

He said that Trump once confided to him that, despite his public explanation of a medical deferment from the Vietnam War, he never had any intention of fighting there.

"You think I'm stupid, I wasn't going to Vietnam," Cohen quoted Trump as saying.

"I find it ironic, President Trump, that you are in Vietnam right now," Cohen said.

## House approves bill to expand gun-sale background checks

By MATTHEW DALY  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Democratic-controlled House on Wednesday approved a measure requiring federal background checks for all firearms sales and transfers, the first major gun control legislation considered by Congress in nearly 25 years.

Democrats called the 240-190 vote a major step to end the gun lobby's grip on Washington and begin to address gun violence that kills thousands of Americans every year, including 17 people shot and killed at a Florida high school last year.

The bill is the first of two the House is voting on this week as Democrats move to tighten gun laws following eight years of Republican control. The other bill would extend the review period for background checks from three to 10 days.

Both bills face dim prospects in the Republican-controlled Senate and veto threats from President Donald Trump, who said they would impose unreasonable requirements on gun owners.

Just eight Republicans joined 232 Democrats to support the bill, while only two Democrats voted against it.

The White House said in a veto message that the background-checks bill could block someone from borrowing a firearm for self-defense or allowing a neighbor to take care of a gun while traveling.

Democrats called those arguments misleading and said gun owners have a responsibility to ensure

firearms are properly handled. The bill includes exceptions allowing temporary transfers to prevent imminent harm or for use at a target range.

The long-delayed bill would merely close loopholes to ensure that background checks are extended to private and online sales that often go undetected, Democrats said.

"People who are felons or are dangerously mentally ill shouldn't have guns," regardless of whether they buy them from a federally licensed dealer or their next-door neighbor, said Rep. Mike Thompson, D-Calif., a key sponsor who has pushed for expanded background checks since the 2012 killing of 20 elementary school students in Newtown, Connecticut.

"For six-and-a-half years, we had no cooperation from the past majority" in the House, Thompson said. "We couldn't get a hearing on the bill. We couldn't get a vote. Today, we're here to tell you it's a new day."



Thompson

## Trump, Kim share smiles, dinner before nuke talks

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un projected optimism Wednesday as they opened high-stakes talks about curbing Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear weapons, a problem that has bedeviled generations of leaders.

The second summit between Trump and Kim came against the backdrop of the American president's domestic troubles. The turmoil in Washington has escalated concerns that Trump, eager for an agreement, would give Kim too much and get too little in return. The leaders' first meeting in June was heavy with pageantry but light on any enforceable agreements for North Korea to give up its nuclear arsenal.

## Border wall prototypes are demolished

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The government is demolishing eight prototypes of Donald Trump's border wall that became powerful symbols of his presidency when they were built nine months

after he took office.

The Trump administration says elements of the prototypes have been melded into current border fence designs and they have served their purpose.

The four concrete and four steel panels, spaced closely together steps from an existing barrier separating San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, were one of Trump's top priorities, and he visited the location a year ago to see the installations firsthand.

## Contrasts abound in Chicago mayoral runoff

CHICAGO (AP) — A political outsider who campaigned on reforming Chicago's police department after a white officer's fatal shooting of a black teenager said Wednesday that voters likely had the high-profile case on their minds when they advanced her to an April runoff for mayor, assuring for the first time a black woman will lead the nation's third-largest city.

Former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot's first-place finish in Tuesday's opening round of voting was surprising considering the 14-candidate field featured prominent state and local leaders.

## BRIEFLY

Lightfoot will go up against the ultimate insider, Toni Preckwinkle — a long-time member of the city council who now holds the top job in Cook County. They are both black women who campaigned as progressives, but that's largely where the similarities end.

## Policital operative arrested in ballot fraud investigation

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The North Carolina political operative at the center of a ballot fraud scandal was arrested Wednesday on criminal charges over activities in the 2016 elections and the Republican primary

in 2018.

The arrest of Leslie McCrae Dowless Jr. came after a grand jury returned indictments alleging illegal possession of absentee ballots and obstruction of justice, Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman said.

Under North Carolina law, it's illegal for anyone other than the voter or a close relative to handle a mail-in ballot.

Also charged were people Dowless is accused of paying in 2016 to collect ballots. The state elections board reported last year that Dowless tried to obstruct investigators by coaching his associates about what they should say if questioned.

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**BAKE AUCTION/RAFFLE**  
Friday, March 8th • 7pm  
Regency Hermiston  
970 W. Juniper Avenue

The family of Regency Hermiston is hosting a bake auction/raffle to raise money to help with medical expenses for Gary Myers who was diagnosed with stage 4 metastatic stomach cancer.

Gary is the husband to our beloved employee Irma Myers. The auction will be held in our activities/long term dining hall.

If you have questions or would like more information about what you can do to help, please call or text Jamie at 509.759.4719

Please come join us.