

Trump declares Mueller testimony a White House win

President and his allies are seizing on testimony as a clear-cut victory

By JONATHAN LEMIRE AND DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

President Donald Trump speaks to members of the media at the White House in Washington on Wednesday as he departs for a short trip to Andrews Air Force Base, Md., and onto Wheeling, W.Va., for a fundraiser.

WASHINGTON — Believing a two-year shadow over the White House at last has been lifted, President Donald Trump seized on Robert Mueller's testimony before Congress on Wednesday as a clear-cut victory, mocking the former special counsel's findings and performance.

After claiming in advance that he might not watch the day's proceedings, Trump blasted "the phony cloud" created by the investigation and declared "there was no defense to this ridiculous hoax, this witch hunt."

"This has been a very bad thing for our country," Trump told reporters upon leaving the White House shortly after Mueller concluded his testimony. He declared that it was an "embarrassment and waste of time."

Trump tweeted and retweeted more than two dozen times during Mueller's testimony about his investigation into the president and the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. As it ended, Trump tweeted: "TRUTH IS A FORCE OF NATURE!"

And, like some of his most visible surrogates including his eldest son, Trump fixated on Mueller's performance, noting his lack of familiarity with some aspects of the investigation and accusing him of playing favorites.

"The performance was obviously not very good. He had a lot of problems," Trump said. "This was a devastating day for Democrats."

Even as the testimony was still underway, Republicans took a victory lap.

Rudy Giuliani, blasted Mueller's frequent stumbles and calls for questions to be repeated, tweeting that the former FBI director was "being destroyed on credibility, knowledge, competence and numerous 'ahs,' pauses and excuses like 'beyond my purview.'"

Mueller's nationally televised appearance on Capitol Hill was long anticipated as a potential inflection point for the presidency, one that could galvanize more House Democrats toward impeachment or help dispel the investigatory cloud that has shadowed the White House for more than two years. Ever mindful of the need to spin powerful televised images, Trump and his fellow Republicans unleashed a barrage of tweets and statements that continued a pattern of attacks in which Trump has made baseless claims about Mueller's probe and its findings.

Before Mueller even took his seat to testify, the president had tweeted nine times

about the investigation, making clear that he had his mind focused squarely on the proceedings unfolding at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

"So Democrats and others can illegally fabricate a crime, try pinning it on a very innocent President, and when he fights back against this illegal and treasonous attack on our Country, they call it Obstruction?" Trump wrote in one early tweet. "Wrong! Why didn't Robert Mueller investigate the investigators?"

In fact, the Mueller report did not declare there was no collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign. Nor did the special counsel's report exonerate Trump on the question of whether he obstructed justice.

Trump also revived a baseless charge that Mueller was "highly conflicted." Mueller, a longtime Republican, was cleared by the Justice Department's ethics experts to lead the Russia investigation.

Trump over the last week had been speculating with confidants about how the hearings would go. And while he expressed no worry that Mueller would reveal anything damaging, Trump was irritated that the former special counsel was being given the national stage, according to two Republicans close to the White House. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Wary of Americans being captivated by finally hearing Mueller speak at length, Trump seethed to one adviser that he was annoyed Democrats would be given a tool to ramp up their investigations — and that cable networks would have new footage of Mueller to play on loop.

Though the probe did not result in charges of criminal conspiracy or obstruction, there has been growing concern among those close to the president that Mueller's appearance could push undecided or reluctant Democrats toward impeachment.

The president had a light schedule Wednesday morning and afternoon during Mueller's testimony. He headed to West Virginia later in the day for a closed evening fundraiser.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM ROBERT MUELLER'S CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

WASHINGTON — Robert Mueller refused to play the part. Not for Republicans and not for Democrats. In back-to-back hearings before the House Judiciary Committee and the House Intelligence Committee, the former special counsel in the investigation of Russian interference into the 2016 presidential elections largely honored his pledge to stick to his 448-page report. He often answered questions in a single word. Republicans tried to get Mueller to spell out the findings that there wasn't enough evidence to prove any criminal conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia. Democrats pressed him to expand on the conclusion in his report that he could not exonerate President Donald Trump on possible charges of obstruction of justice.

But Mueller left both sides wanting.

Some key takeaways from his testimony:

MUELLER WOULDN'T BE A MOUTHPIECE

Mueller wouldn't even read from his own report. That made it challenging for Democrats who called him in hopes that the sheer force of hearing him say the words on television would be more powerful to many Americans than the written form. But Mueller demurred, and Democrats had to read his words for him.

Similarly, Mueller wouldn't answer specifically when Republicans repeatedly tried to question him about the origins of the Russia investigation, the use of secret surveillance warrants. Mueller would only speak generally about Peter Stroz, a former FBI agent on his team who helped lead the investigation and exchanged anti-Trump text messages during the 2016 election with ex-FBI lawyer Lisa Page.

Mueller left it to the partisans to do the parsing.

RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IS STILL HAPPENING

Mueller was, for him anyway, far more expansive when he was asked about Russia's interference in U.S. elections. He also condemned Trump's praise of WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy group that released material stolen from Democratic groups, including Hillary Clinton's campaign.

"Problematic is an understatement," he said.

U.S. intelligence agencies and Mueller's investigation determined Russian government entities were responsible for the hack and furnished the embarrassing correspondence to WikiLeaks in order to support Trump's bid for the presidency. Authorities also found Russia engaged in an organized social media effort to sow discord among American voters. Mueller warned that what Russia did in 2016 was not a "single attempt."

"They're doing it as we sit here," he told lawmakers.

INDICTING THE PRESIDENT WAS NEVER AN OPTION

During his testimony, Mueller made clear that his team never considered charging the president with a crime because of Justice Department guidelines.

Mueller, in his testimony Wednesday morning to the House Judiciary Committee, seemed to agree that he would have charged Trump with obstruction of justice had it not been for department guidance that a president cannot be indicted. Democrats seized on that answer, but Mueller then said, "That is not the correct way to say it."

Mueller later said his team "did not reach a determination as to whether the president committed a crime."

"IT IS NOT A WITCH HUNT"

Mueller swung back at the characterization made hundreds of times by Trump that the Russia investigation that shadowed his presidency was a "rigged witch hunt."

"It is not a witch hunt," Mueller testified.

Asked what he wanted the American public to take from his report, Mueller said: "We spent substantial time ensuring the integrity of the report."

One of the only other times Mueller pushed back on lawmakers during hours of questioning was to offer a spirited defense of the investigation.

"I don't think you all reviewed a report that is as thorough, as fair, as consistent as the report that we have in front of us," Mueller said.

Mueller said his nearly two-year investigation was conducted in a "fair and independent manner." He also repeatedly praised the prosecutors, FBI agents and analysts who worked on his team, saying they were "of the highest integrity" and were "absolutely exemplary."

IMPEACHMENT REMAINS UNLIKELY

Mueller's testimony likely did little to change many minds in Congress on impeachment. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has made clear she will not pursue impeachment, for now. Mueller wouldn't take the bait as Democrats asked whether he meant for his report to serve as a referral to Congress to consider impeaching the president. He even seemed to make strides to not even say the word.

Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-Texas, asked Mueller about a mention in Mueller's report about "constitutional processes for addressing presidential misconduct."

Mueller refused to answer when asked specifically whether one of those was impeachment.

— Associated Press

Border Patrol chief says she told of being in Facebook group

By ASTRID GALVAN
Associated Press

sex act on President Donald Trump.

PHOENIX — The head of the U.S. Border Patrol said Wednesday that she joined a Facebook group whose members mocked migrants and lawmakers so she could read what her personnel thought about her, and said she knew little about the group.

Chief Carla Provost said during a congressional subcommittee hearing in Washington that she logged on to Facebook very rarely and that she immediately reported her membership in the group to an oversight division of U.S. Customs and Border Protection after she realized she was a member.

Provost earlier this month had issued a statement condemning the posts without saying that she was a member.

Sixty-two current and eight former Border Patrol employees are being investigated for their role in the "I'm 10-15" Facebook group, where agents questioned the authenticity of images of a migrant father and child dead in a river. They also posted crude and doctored images of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez purporting to perform a

sex act on President Donald Trump. Reports later revealed Provost was a member of the group, although she did not confirm those reports until her congressional testimony.

She said during the hearing that she handed over her login and password to Customs and Border Protection's Office of Professional Responsibility, adding that she very rarely used her Facebook account and only did so to stay in touch with friends and colleagues who live out of town.

Provost said she once commented in the group on a post about a question from the TV show "Jeopardy" because her agents were talking about her in that post, Provost said. She was the subject of the "Jeopardy" question.

"I didn't even know at the time what group I was on," she said.

Provost said she joined the secret group in 2017 at the invitation of a colleague who told her agents were discussing her performance in her role at the time of acting chief. She said she would search her name in Facebook and read posts about herself without noticing whether the posts were in any specific group.

Wind shifts huge wildfire away from nuke facilities in Idaho

By REBECCA BOONE AND FELICIA FONSECA
Associated Press

stations, a lot of fire equipment, we have trained firefighters and equipment to cut barriers."

BOISE, Idaho — The largest wildfire at the nation's primary nuclear research facility in recent history had been burning close to buildings containing nuclear fuel and other radioactive material but a change in wind direction Wednesday was pushing the flames into open range at the sprawling site in Idaho, officials said.

The lightning-caused fire at the Idaho National Laboratory is one of several across the U.S. West.

Before the wind shifted, the Idaho blaze got close to several lab facilities, including one where high-level radioactive materials are studied and another holding a nuclear reactor, spokeswoman Kerry Martin said. She said she didn't know how close the flames got to those buildings.

The lab has several safety measures for wildfires that often ignite in southeastern Idaho's desert rangeland, including clearing ground around each building and having several specially trained fire crews stationed around the site that's nearly the size of Rhode Island.

"It's not our first rodeo," Martin said. "We have fire

The wildfire that ignited Monday is estimated to have burned about 172 square miles. Non-essential laboratory employees have been evacuated.

The nuclear research site includes reactors and research materials, as well as facilities for processing high-level nuclear waste and other radioactive waste.

Meanwhile, rain in a forested Arizona city helped firefighters battle a wildfire that has raged for days in a scenic mountain pass but was raising the risk of flooding, officials said.

Up to 1 inch of rain allowed crews to directly attack the fire, extinguish flames and build containment lines in an area where nearly 3 square miles have burned since Sunday, said fire management team spokesman Steve Kliest.

Forecasters warned of possible flooding in Flagstaff neighborhoods with aging drainage systems below the fire. Thunderstorms Wednesday and Thursday were expected to drench fire-scarred areas of the Coconino National Forest surrounding the city, a popular mountain getaway in the largest ponderosa pine forest in the U.S.

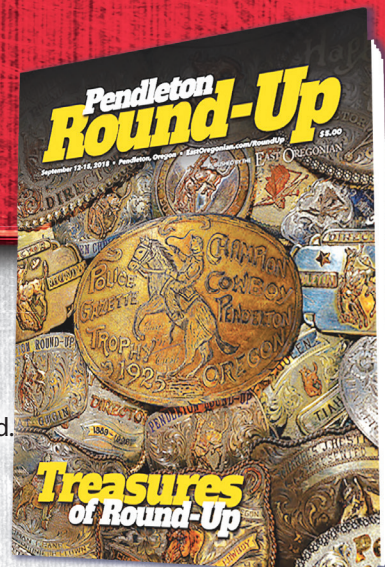
The EO's Biggest Special Publication of the Year

COMING September 4th, 2019

Trust your advertising dollar to a company that has been in the publishing business for more than a century.

- Proven Distribution network of 20,000 magazines
- Distributed in the East Oregonian, Hermiston Herald, Wallowa County Chieftain, Blue Mountain Eagle, La Grande Observer and Baker City Herald.
- Available in Hotels, Motels and RV Parks and Pendleton Chamber of Commerce.
- Collectible High Gloss Magazine
- Trust your advertising dollar to a company that has been in the Round-Up Business for years.
- Early bird advertising rates available now, reserve your space now!

Hermiston Herald
EAST OREGONIAN



Angela Treadwell
541-966-0827
atreadwell@eastoregonian.com

Rowan Treadwell
541-278-2670
rowan@eastoregonian.com

Grace Bubar
541-276-2214
gbubar@eastoregonian.com

Jeanne Jewett
541-564-4531
jjewett@hermistonherald.com

Audra Workman
541-564-4538
aworkman@eastoregonian.com