

Standoff: Trump sees hoax, Dems see stonewalling

By LISA MASCARO,
MARY CLARE
JALONICK AND
JONATHAN LEMIRE
Associated Press



President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto in the Oval Office of the White House on Wednesday in Washington.

AP Photo/Evan Vucci

WASHINGTON — Agitated and angry, President Donald Trump squared off against House Democrats on Wednesday, packing his increasingly aggressive impeachment defense with name-calling and expletives. Quietly but just as resolutely, lawmakers expanded their inquiry, promising a broad new subpoena for documents and witnesses.

Democratic leaders put the White House on notice that the wide-ranging subpoena would be coming for information about Trump's actions in the Ukraine controversy, the latest move in an impeachment probe that's testing the Constitution's system of checks and balances. They said they'd be going to court if necessary.

Amid the legal skirmishing, it was a day of verbal fireworks.

The president complained that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was handing out subpoenas "like cookies," railed against a government whistleblower as "vicious" and assailed the news media as corrupt and the "enemy." All that alongside a presidential tweetstorm punctuated with an accusation that congressio-

nal Democrats waste time and money on "BULL----."

Pelosi said Democrats had no choice but to take on the most "solemn" of constitutional responsibilities to put a check on executive power after the national security whistleblower's complaint that recently came to light. The administration and Congress are on a collision course unseen in a generation after the whistleblower exposed a July phone call the president had with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which Trump pressed for an investigation of Democratic political rival Joe Biden and

his family.

"We take this to be a very sad time" for the American people and the country, Pelosi said. "Impeaching the president isn't anything to be joyful about."

Standing beside her, intelligence committee Chairman Adam Schiff accused Trump of "an incitement to violence" with his attacks on the unnamed whistleblower, who is provided anonymity and other protections under federal law. He said the investigation is proceeding "deliberately" but also with a sense of "urgency."

Unlike Trump, Schiff

never raised his voice but said firmly: "We're not fooling around here."

Pelosi, in a "Good Morning America" interview said Trump is "scared" of the impeachment inquiry and the arguments that can be made against him.

Democrats are now talking of basing an impeachment charge of obstruction on the White House's slow-walking of documents and testimony — administration actions that echo the months of resisting Congress in its other investigations into special counsel Robert Mueller's report and Trump's business dealings.

Ahead of the new subpoena, the chairmen of three House committees accused the administration of "flagrant disregard" of previous requests for documents and witnesses and said that refusal could be considered an impeachable offense.

The standoff took on a defiant tone this week when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he would not stand for Democrats "bullying" his employees into appearing before the congressional committees, even as he acknowledged that he, too, had been among those U.S. officials listening on the line during the Trump's phone call with the Ukraine leader.

Pompeo's admission is complicating his situation, and House leaders now consider him a "witness" to Trump's interaction with Ukraine.

One former State Department official, Kurt Volker, a former special envoy to Ukraine, was scheduled to appear Thursday for a closed-door interview with House investigators. He was said to be eager to tell his side of the story. That's ahead of next week's deposition of ousted U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Maria "Masha" Yovanovitch.

The circumstances of Yovanovitch's sudden recall from Ukraine are the subject of conspiracy speculation, and the State Department's

Inspector General Michael Steve Linick sought an "urgent" meeting Wednesday to brief staff of several committees.

During that private session, Linick told them he received a packet of materials from the State Department's Counsel T. Ulrich Brechbuhl, according to one person granted anonymity to discuss the closed-door session.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., said the package contained information from debunked conspiracy theories about Ukraine's role in the 2016 election. Trump has long pursued those theories, a topic he discussed with Zelenskyy in the phone call that sparked the impeachment inquiry.

It was unclear where the package originated, but it was in a White House envelope and included folders from Trump hotels, according to another person familiar with the briefing, a Democrat. That person said the White House sent the envelope to Pompeo and it contained notes from interviews that took place in the New York City office of Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, with various Ukrainians about the debunked conspiracies.

"It raises more questions than it answers," said Raskin. Brechbuhl has also been called to give a deposition to the House.

Billionaire, friend get no-jail plea deal in Vegas drug case

By KEN RITTER
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A billionaire California technology firm founder and his friend took no-jail plea deals Wednesday that had them donate \$1 million to charities while not admitting guilt in a Las Vegas Strip hotel room drug investigation.

Henry Thompson Nicholas III and co-defendant Ashley Christine Fargo stood with their attorneys in court and entered so-called "Alford pleas" to two felony drug possession charges. Their pleas acknowledged that prosecutors could have presented evidence of guilt if the case had gone to trial.

Nicholas' and Fargo's criminal cases can be dismissed in one year if they do not commit crimes, fulfill 250 hours of community service and undergo twice-monthly personal drug counseling, according to the plea agreement their attorneys negotiated with prosecutors.

Defense attorney David Chesnoff said Nicholas and Fargo together donated \$400,000 to drug prevention and treatment programs at both the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Nevada and the Foundation for Recovery in Las Vegas. Another \$200,000 went to the PACT Coalition for Safe & Drug Free Communities in Las Vegas, Chesnoff said.

"The defendants maintain their innocence," Chesnoff told Clark County District Court Judge Jacqueline Bluth.

Chesnoff said police had no fingerprint or forensic evidence linking Nicholas and Fargo directly to the heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and several psychedelic substances that police reported finding in travel cases in the couple's hotel room in August 2018.

Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson dropped five more serious drug trafficking charges as part of the agreement.

Nevada state lawmakers this year passed laws reducing penalties for personal drug use and the charges

against Nicholas and Fargo would have resulted in no more than probation if they had been brought next year, Wolfson said. That factored into his decision to offer the plea deals, he said.

"On top of that, they offered to contribute \$1 million to drug facilities and programs from which hundreds and hundreds of Clark County residents are going to benefit," Wolfson said.

Prosecutor Brad Turner told Bluth there was no evidence that Nicholas or Fargo intended to sell or distribute drugs.

"The only evidence we have, the way it was packaged and where it was, it was for personal use," Turner said.

Nicholas is 59. Fargo said she's 38. Their attorneys filed documents in July denying they owned the cases with drugs, and Turner said Wednesday that possession could have been hard to prove to a jury.

Nicholas co-founded Broadcom in 1991 in a Southern California condominium, earned a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from UCLA in 1998 and retired in 2003 from the publicly traded computer software, semiconductor and infrastructure company. Forbes estimates his current net worth at almost \$4 billion.

Chesnoff and attorney Richard Schonfeld, representing Nicholas, have

emphasized their client's philanthropy and financial backing for the crime victim advocacy law known in California as Marsy's Law. Attorney David Brown represented Fargo. Both defendants live in the Newport Beach, California, area.

Marsy's Law is named for Nicholas' sister, Marsalee "Marsy" Nicholas, who was stalked and killed by an ex-boyfriend in the 1980s. Nevada is among several U.S. states with a version of the law, which aims to codify rights for crime victims and their families to confer with prosecutors and attend court proceedings. Wolfson was among elected officials who endorsed the measure in Nevada.

Director: Christopher was compensated for work performed

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Daron Hill responded that she was "compensated for work performed."

Reached by phone Monday, Christopher declined to comment.

"I'm not interested in talking with you, thanks," she said, before hanging up on a reporter.

Hill provided Christopher's weekly work schedules to the Oregon Capital Bureau through a public records request.

She worked about 1,400 hours on various projects for the state, according to

records provided by Legislative Administration.

But there was no record disclosed by the Legislature about what Christopher did in her first three months. Her schedules begin April 5.

For the five months she documented, her schedule included 109 hours on phone calls and 98 reviewing and responding to emails. The schedule typically showed up to two hours a day dealing with email.

Christopher also reported working on research for the Oregon

Department of Justice, the nature of which has been redacted from public view, and on attending legislative hearings and dealing with information technology problems.

A spokeswoman for the justice department said that agency didn't compensate Christopher for any work and that any questions should be directed to the Legislature.

Christopher also spent some time organizing and doing an inventory of documents, the nature of which were also redacted. Several other entries state

"Research for" or "Work on" but the rest has been redacted.

Hill said that Christopher satisfied her contract requirements to complete a salary survey of legislative positions, a hiring analysis, and several other tasks.

Christopher inked the retirement deal after a period of widespread criticism of the workplace culture at the Capitol.

In early 2018, Jeff Kruse, a Republican state senator from Roseburg, resigned after he was investigated for inappropriately touching colleagues and interns

at the statehouse.

In March, the Legislature agreed to pay about \$1.1 million to settle with nine people who had experienced harassment working at the Capitol.

As human resources director, Christopher was a key contact for people reporting harassment or other workplace problems at the Oregon Legislature.

She was identified in a state investigation of harassment at the Capitol as one of the officials who failed to react fully to complaints.

Christopher, a for-

mer mayor of Keizer, had worked since 1997 as director of Employee Services — the Legislature's human resources office.

She was the interim director until March, when Jessica Knieling took over the post. Knieling is paid about \$13,600 a month.

"The work assigned to Ms. Christopher was part of her separation agreement signed in September and was anticipated to be in addition to the work of the Employee Services director," Hill wrote in an email to the Oregon Capital Bureau this week.

Community: Nobody else wanted the job of watering the city's plant baskets

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Following the water cart came a trailer with a gasoline generator to run a pump, while this was effective, Hart says that neighbors were not particularly fond of the loud generator first thing in the morning. Hart now uses a quiet electric pump that hooks into his truck and is the best of both worlds for him.

In addition to maintaining the trailer, Hart makes his own watering devices out of PVC pipe in order to reach the baskets several feet above his head. Additionally, he will use the bed of his pickup truck as

a place to stand whenever possible. Hart says that he rarely runs into problems, however, he often has to work around parked cars or other obstacles.

"When they first installed the crosswalks I went over one and lost the full trailer off the hitch," said Hart. "That one took awhile to figure out how to fix and get the full 209-gallon trailer back on the truck."

While Hart doesn't encounter many people on weekday mornings he says that occasionally someone will join him and walk along the route with him or he'll bring his dogs along for the ride.

"People always wonder how the plants are watered and what keeps them looking so good," Hart said. "Outside of a little dead-heading, some fertilizer once a week and water daily there's not too much that goes into it."

Hart says that he estimates they use about 100 gallons of water each day, but that the amount varies depending on the time of year and the weather. The baskets are watered daily from mid-May through the first freeze, usually in October.

Despite the early hours and time commitment, Hart says that he doesn't foresee stopping anytime soon.

Drones: Farmers, cops and other locals talk drones at trade conference

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subject who dived into a river while trying to escape.

Deputies tried to use their drone to contain the suspect while they tracked him, but without the aid of observing the drone's live camera feed through goggles, the suspect was able to wade by the UAS undetected before being found elsewhere.

Roberts said he often feels hamstrung by the current laws that govern drone usage, which cut down on the department's ability to deploy them.

"The law and the industry aren't really married up yet," he said.

On the farming panel, UAS adopters said their limitations were more technical, often involving the need for more battery life or improved software.

Waggoner said the drone he uses to track underwater weeds is fine for ponds and stillwater bodies, but it doesn't work well with a flowing river. He said the future for that task is with submersible unmanned vehicles.

During an audience question period, one attendee asked how law enforcement planned to counteract people using drones for criminal activities.

Johnson said the conversation has come up in his

office, but he didn't have an answer yet.

Patrick Sherman, a UAS official who works with a nonprofit that promotes drones used for public safety, offered a few answers of his own.

Sherman said some countries use radio jammers to disrupt criminal drone operators, but the U.S. doesn't allow for jammers because it disrupts other technology like cellphones.

He also said law enforcement could physically intercept these drones, either with a falcon or eagle, or with another drone that grounds the illicit UAS with a net.