

Bannon says Stone was Trump campaign link to WikiLeaks

By ASHRAF KHALIL AND
MICHAEL BALSAMO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's campaign viewed Roger Stone as an "access point" to WikiLeaks and tried to use him to get advanced word about hacked emails damaging to Hillary Clinton that the anti-secrecy group released during the 2016 presidential race, a former top presidential adviser testified Friday.

In reluctant testimony, former campaign CEO Steve Bannon told a federal court that Stone, on trial for lying to Congress and witness tampering, had boasted about his ties to WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange, alerting them to pending new batches of damaging emails.

"The campaign had no official access to WikiLeaks or to Julian Assange," Bannon told the court. "But Roger would be considered if we needed an access point."

It was the first time that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign acknowledged in court that they had actively sought material from Wikileaks, which released material that U.S. intelligence



AP Photo/AI Drago
Former White House strategist Steve Bannon, left, arrives to testify for the federal trial of Roger Stone, at federal court in Washington on Friday.

agencies determined had been hacked by the Russian government in order to damage Clinton.

The White House had no immediate comment.

Stone, a colorful political operative and Trump ally, is charged with witness tampering and lying to Congress about his attempts to contact WikiLeaks about the dam-

aging material during the 2016 presidential campaign.

While Stone repeatedly "implied that he had a connection with WikiLeaks," he never stated it directly, Bannon said.

The campaign took Stone's boasts seriously enough to follow up, asking why expected information about Clinton wasn't revealed

when Assange held a press conference in October 2016.

Bannon, who testified in response to a subpoena, did not say anything about Trump and said Stone had not been sent by anyone on the campaign to talk to Assange.

Earlier this week, a former FBI agent testified about a flurry of phone calls between Stone and then-candidate Trump — including three calls on July 14, 2016 — the day that a massive hack of the Democratic National Committee's servers was reported. But the agent said she did not know what was discussed on those calls.

As he left the courthouse, Bannon griped about being subpoenaed by prosecutors and Congress in addition to being interviewed several times by special counsel Robert Mueller's team as it investigated Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

"I was forced and compelled to come here today," he said as he climbed into a waiting SUV outside the courthouse.

Bannon's testimony came after comedian and radio talk show Randy Credico told jurors that Stone pressured him into backing

up lies he told Congress, threatening to take away his dog at one point. Credico said Stone pressed him to "go along" with a false account of the operative's contacts with WikiLeaks during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

"He wanted me to go along with this narrative," Credico said in his second day of testimony.

Stone called a Credico a "rat" and a "stoolie" in a threatening April 2018 email. Credico also testified that Stone used repeated references from the movie "The Godfather Part II" to intimidate him into either backing up Stone's testimony to Congress or refusing to testify.

"My lawyers are dying to rip you to shreds. I'm going to take that dog away from you," he said in the email, which Credico read aloud in court. And while Credico testified he considered the threat "hyperbole," he also said that Stone "plays hardball" and "I did not want to rile the guy."

The radio host told the court he's had his dog Bianca, a small breed known as a coton de tular, since 2006. "I have no wife, no kids, I've been around the dog for 12 years," he said.

Possible chemical culprit found in vaping illness outbreak

U.S. health officials reporting a breakthrough in their investigation

By MIKE STOBBE
Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. health officials announced a breakthrough Friday into the cause of a mysterious outbreak of vaping illnesses, reporting they have a "very strong culprit."

The same chemical compound was found in fluid taken from the lungs of 29 patients across the country, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. The compound — vitamin E acetate — was previously found in liquid from electronic cigarettes and other vaping devices used by many of those who got sick.

This is the first time they've found a common suspect in the damaged lungs of patients, officials said.

"We are in a better place in terms of having one very strong culprit," said the CDC's Dr. Anne Schuchat.

But agency officials cautioned they cannot rule out



AP Photo/Hans Pennink

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta said fluid extracted from 29 lung injury patients who vaped contained the chemical compound vitamin E acetate.

all other toxic substances, and it may take animal studies to clearly show vitamin E acetate causes the lung damage that's been seen.

More than 2,000 Americans who vape have gotten sick since March, many of them teen and young adults, and at least 40 people have died. The bulk of the cases occurred in August and September but new cases are still being reported.

Vitamin E acetate has only recently been used as a thickener in vaping fluid, particularly in black market vape cartridges. While vitamin E is safe as a vitamin

pill or to use on the skin, inhaling oily droplets of it can be harmful. It's sticky and stays in the lungs — the CDC's Dr. Jim Pirkle likened it to honey.

Many who got sick said they had vaped liquids that contain THC, the high-inducing part of marijuana, with many saying they got them from friends or bought them on the black market.

E-cigarettes and other vaping devices heat a liquid into an inhalable vapor. For years, most products contained nicotine, but THC vaping has been growing more common.

Got a weird text? A telecom vendor says it's to blame for the error

By TALI ARBEL
Associated Press

PORTLAND — If you woke up to a weird text that seemed totally out of place, you aren't alone. A mysterious wave of missives swept America's phones overnight, delivering confusing messages from friends, family and the occasional ex.

Friends who hadn't talked to each other in months were jolted into chatting. Others briefly panicked.

A telecom vendor called Syniverse said a server failed on Feb. 14, and thousands of messages from multiple carriers didn't go through. When that server was reactivated Thursday, those messages got sent.

Syniverse initially estimated about 170,000 messages, but the company now says it's higher, without saying how many. Syniverse said it is reviewing internal procedures so this doesn't happen again. Syniverse typically deletes messages

that don't go through.

The sudden release of messages sometimes had a dramatic effect.

Stephanie Bovee, a 28-year-old from Portland, woke up at 5 a.m. to a text from her sister that said just "omg." She immediately thought something had happened to her newborn nephew at the hospital.

She started calling everyone. Her sister and her sister's husband didn't answer. She woke up her mom, freaking her out. It was three hours before she learned that everything was fine and the text was an odd anomaly.

"Now it's funny," she said. "But out of context, it was not cool."

Bovee figured out that people were getting some of her old texts that failed to go through when her sister and a co-worker both got texts that she had sent in February. The text her sister received wished her a happy Valentine's Day.

Marissa Figueroa, a 25-year-old from Turlock,

California, got an unwanted message from an ex she had stopped talking to — and then he got one from her as well. Neither actually sent them recently, both said. Figueroa couldn't figure it out, even worrying that her ex was messing with her, until she saw reports of this happening to others.

"It didn't feel great," she said. "It just was not good for me and my mental health to be in contact with him."

A friend who'd just reentered his life got a mystifying message from Joseph Gomez at 5:32 a.m. Thursday. In that text, Gomez seemed to assume she was on her way over to his house so they could order a Lyft.

It took a half hour of back-and-forth texting and help from a screenshot to clear up the situation. Can their relationship recover? Gomez, who is 22 and lives in Washington, D.C., said it was "confusion, then awkward, and then funny." No mixed messages there.



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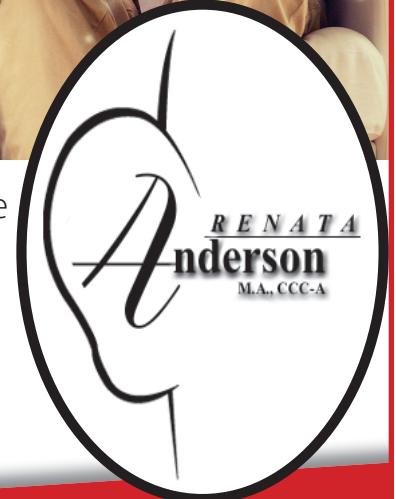
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Renata Anderson, MA



Pam Wagenaar,
Administrative Assistant

2237 SW Court, Pendleton • 541-276-5053
www.renataanderson.com