To: Block, Molly[block.molly@epa.gov]
From: Cory, Preston (Katherine)
Sent: Fri 4/20/2018 2:10:38 PM
Subject: RE: EPA Morning News Highlights 04.20.18

Yes ma'am! Thanks

From: Block, Molly
Sent: Friday, April 20, 2018 10:10 AM
To: Cory, Preston (Katherine) <Cory.Preston@epa.gov>
Subject: Fwd: EPA Morning News Highlights 04.20.18

Just wanted to make sure you got these.

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Daniell, Kelsi" <daniell.kelsi@epa.gov>
Date: April 20, 2018 at 8:55:21 AM CDT
To: "Hewitt, James" <hewitt.james@epa.gov>, "Beach, Christopher" <beach.christopher@epa.gov>, "Beck, Nancy" <Beck.Nancy@epa.gov>, "Bennett, Tate" <Bennett.Tate@epa.gov>, "Block, Molly" <block.molly@epa.gov>, "Bodine, Susan" <bodine.susan@epa.gov>, "Bowman, Liz" <Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>, "Ferguson, Lincoln" <ferguson.lincoln@epa.gov>, "Ford, Hayley" <ford.hayley@epa.gov>, "Frye, Tony (Robert)" <frye.robert@epa.gov>, "Gordon, Stephen" <gordon.stephen@epa.gov>, "Grantham, Nancy" <Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov>, "Gunasekara, Mandy" <Gunasekara.Mandy@epa.gov>, "Hanson, Paige (Catherine)" <hanson.catherine@epa.gov>, "Jackson, Ryan" <jackson.ryan@epa.gov>, "Kelly, Albert" <kelly.albert@epa.gov>, "Konkus, John" <konkus.john@epa.gov>, "Leopold, Matt" <Leopold.Matt@epa.gov>, "Letendre, Daisy" <letendre.daisy@epa.gov>, "Lyons, Troy" <lyons.troy@epa.gov>, "McMurray, Forrest" <mcmurray.forrest@epa.gov>, "Palich, Christian" <palich.christian@epa.gov>, "Ringel, Aaron" <ringel.aaron@epa.gov>, "Rodrick, Christian" <rodrick.christian@epa.gov>, "Ross, David P" <ross.davidp@epa.gov>, "Shimmin, Kaitlyn" <shimmin.kaitlyn@epa.gov>, "Wehrum, Bill" <Wehrum.Bill@epa.gov>, "Wilcox, Jahan" <wilcox.jahan@epa.gov>, "Abboud, Michael" <abboud.michael@epa.gov>, "Daniell, Kelsi" <daniell.kelsi@epa.gov>, "Cory, Preston (Katherine)" <Cory.Preston@epa.gov>
Subject: EPA Morning News Highlights 04.20.18

EPA Morning News Highlights 04.20.18

BNA: Indian to Get EPA Money for Lead Cleanup, Water Upgrades.

The EPA is giving the Hoosier State a loan of nearly half a billion dollars to upgrade its water systems, with plans to spend additional money to clean up a lead-contaminated site in the northwestern part of the state. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on April 19 visited Whiting, Ind., home of a former Federated Metals plant that is now a Superfund site. Pruitt said his agency would spend $1.7 million to address lead contamination at the former copper, lead, and zinc smelter.

Brietbart: Exclusive—Talgo: EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt Should Be Applauded, Not Attacked

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt has unquestionably been the most effective official in President Donald Trump's administration. He has laid waste to Barack Obama's radical environmental legacy, which is why Democrats, the mainstream media, academia, environmentalists, and left-wing advocacy groups are in full-panic mode. Out of desperation, these zealots (aided by the media) are resorting to unwarranted character assaults to challenge Pruitt's integrity and diminish his authority.

Gulf Live: EPA Administrator Signs $107.6 Million Memorandum to Clean Mississippi Phosphates Site

The Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt signed an Action Memorandum for $107.6 million on Wednesday, accelerating the cleanup of the former Mississippi Phosphates Corporation (MPC) Site in Pascagoula. In January, Pruitt and his team added MPC to its Superfund Priorities List after the agency announced in August 2017 their intentions to recommend the site for the list because of the environmental hazard it posed to marine and human life in the City of Pascagoula. The Action Memorandum signed Wednesday selects a $71.6 million cleanup that will take place from 2018 through 2020, plus $36 million for ongoing wastewater treatment during the three-year cleanup period.

Daily Caller: Associated Press Publishes Misleading Headline on Scott Pruitt's Travel Arrangements

The Environmental Protection Agency is pushing back against The Associated Press' reporting on Administrator Scott Pruitt's private travel. The AP released a report on Wednesday titled: "EPA chief sat in coach when not flying on taxpayer's dime." The headline — and the opening lede — suggested that the leader of the EPA makes more

economical decisions when taking personal flights, as opposed to his travel when conducting official business. Pruitt has received criticism for flying first class on the taxpayers' dime, an arrangement he says is made for security reasons. The AP story centered on how Pruitt flew coach on Southwest Airlines when he made personal trips to Oklahoma in August and September.

Tulsa World: Scott Pruitt Showed Penchant for Travel, Drivers Even Before Being Named EPA Head

Scott Pruitt's penchant for travel and concerns about security were notable even before he became head of the Environmental Protection Agency, according to newly obtained records that show that as Oklahoma's attorney general he frequently traveled out-of-state for appearances before conservative groups and used an office investigator as a driver. As Oklahoma's top prosecutor from 2011 to 2016, Pruitt was raising his profile nationally as a conservative in favor of rolling back regulation and federal authority.

National Morning News Highlights 04.20.18

Associated Press: In Comey Memos, Trump Fixates on 'Hookers,' Frets Over Flynn

The 15 pages of documents contain new details about a series of interactions with Trump that Comey found so unnerving that he chose to document them in writing. Those seven encounters in the weeks and months before Comey's May 2017 firing include a Trump Tower discussion about allegations involving Trump and prostitutes in Moscow; a White House dinner at which Comey says Trump asked him for his loyalty; and a private Oval Office discussion where the ex-FBI head says the president asked him to end an investigation into Michael Flynn, the former White House national security adviser.

The Washington Post: Trump Hires Giuliana, Two Other Attorneys Amid Mounting Legal Turmoil Over Russia

Former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and two other former federal prosecutors joined President Trump's legal team Thursday following weeks of turbulence and struggles to find attorneys who would agree to represent the president in the ongoing federal probe into Russian election interference. The reshuffling comes at a particularly tense juncture for Trump, who aides said is increasingly frustrated by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's

investigation and with the senior officials at the Justice Department.

TRUMP TWEETS

BNA

https://www.bna.com/indiana-epa-money-n57982091298/

Indiana to Get EPA Money for Lead Cleanup, Water Upgrades

By: David Schultz, 4/19/18

The EPA is giving the Hoosier State a loan of nearly half a billion dollars to upgrade its water systems, with plans to spend additional money to clean up a lead-contaminated site in the northwestern part of the state.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on April 19 visited Whiting, Ind., home of a former Federated Metals plant that is now a Superfund site. Pruitt said his agency would spend $1.7 million to address lead contamination at the former copper, lead, and zinc smelter.

Pruitt also highlighted a $436 million loan from the Environmental Protection Agency to Indiana through the agency's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act program, which provides low-cost financing for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure upgrades. The agency first announced last summer it had accepted Indiana's application for this loan as part of its first-ever round of financing under the program established in 2014.

The EPA said in an April 19 statement that the money would flow through to the state "once all needed processes are complete." The loan cleared a preliminary EPA environmental review earlier this year. This loan is one of 12 that the EPA granted through its first $2.3 billion round of financing through this program.

The agency's press office did not immediately respond to Bloomberg Environment's

request for comment on what specific actions the EPA took on April 19 on the Indiana loan or about whether the loan has been finalized.

Pruitt Talks to Residents

The announcement came after Pruitt personally visited Whiting, which is on Lake Michigan, and spoke with people living near the contaminated Federated Minerals site.

"There was a woman who was a property owner waiting for them," Thomas Frank, an activist with the East Chicago, Ind.-based Community Strategy Group, an environmental justice advocacy coalition, told Bloomberg Environment. "Apparently her property tested high in lead and she was showing them where the tests had occurred,"

Pruitt was at the Indiana site about 10 or 15 minutes, Frank said.

Pruitt also made a stop lasting less than 20 minutes at the EPA's Region 5 headquarters in Chicago, Mike Mikulka, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 704 union, told Bloomberg Environment.

Brietbart

http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2018/04/19/exclusive-talgo-epa-administrator-scott-pruitt-should-be-applauded-not-attacked/

Exclusive—Talgo: EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt Should Be Applauded, Not Attacked

By: Chris Talgo, 4/19/18

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt has unquestionably been the most effective official in President Donald Trump's administration.

He has laid waste to Barack Obama's radical environmental legacy, which is why Democrats, the mainstream media, academia, environmentalists, and left-wing advocacy groups are in full-panic mode. Out of desperation, these zealots (aided by the media) are resorting to unwarranted character assaults to challenge Pruitt's integrity and diminish his authority.

The disingenuousness of these attacks is made evident by the silence of these same groups when several Obama-era federal agencies engaged in illegal and/or unethical activities. The fact very few Americans know the name "Richard Windsor" is proof of selective outrage by "good government" groups and the media. (Windsor is the name of a fake EPA employee created by former EPA head Lisa Jackson to skirt public-records laws.)

Thankfully, Pruitt is not letting ad hominem attacks distract him from his mission of implementing a "back to basics" agenda for EPA. Unlike most of his predecessors at EPA and his opponents on the left, Pruitt believes, "We can and we will achieve clean air and clean water and we will also have strong economic growth and job creation at the same time."

To accomplish these long-overdue reforms, Pruitt has focused on and been incredibly successful at implementing a "three E's" strategy: concentrating on the environment, economy, and engagement with state and local governments.

1. **Protecting the Environment**
2.

Under Obama, the EPA became a highly politicized agency, one that had been captured by radical environmental groups. When Pruitt took office, he vowed to refocus the agency on its core mission: protecting the environment and staying out of politics.

In May 2017, Pruitt created the Super Fund Task Force "to provide recommendations for improving and expediting site cleanups and promoting redevelopment." As of this writing, EPA has already completed seven Super Fund site clean-ups.

Additionally, EPA is prioritizing drinking water problems, including the egregious lead problem that arose during the Obama era in Flint, Michigan.

2. **Sensible regulations that encourage economic growth**

Obama's two EPA administrators, Jackson and Gina McCarthy, instituted an unprecedented era of unnecessary, costly, burdensome rulemaking, undermining personal property rights and economic growth.

Fortunately, Pruitt has put an end to this. His highlights, which are many, include announcing that the United States will pull out of the Paris climate accord.

In 2016, Obama pushed the United States into the Paris climate agreement, which analysts found would reduce U.S. gross domestic product by more than $2.5 trillion and result in an average annual job loss of nearly 400,000 by 2035 compared to jobs projections without the accord.

Pruitt has been a staunch advocate of withdrawing from this fake "treaty," and his support for the idea surely contributed to Trump's decision to pull back from the Paris accords.

In October 2017, Pruitt proposed repealing Obama's Clean Power Plan, a set of regulations that economists estimated would cost U.S. taxpayers $40 billion per year and produce no effect on global carbon dioxide levels.

Also in October, Pruitt issued a directive to end EPA's "sue and settle" practices, a scheme in which radical environmental groups sue EPA to impose their agenda and EPA chooses not to fight the lawsuit in order to satisfy radical environmentalists' demands.

Putting the interests of ordinary Americans ahead of special-interest groups, Pruitt declared in October 2017 "the days of regulation through litigation are over."

In another measure designed to protect consumers, Pruitt announced in March 2018 the EPA will no longer use "secret science" in crafting regulations. Going forward, EPA rulemaking will be transparent and based on good data—not ideology.

Most recently, Pruitt suspended for review the onerous Corporate Annual Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards Obama's regime rushed through near the end of his final term. These burdensome regulations mandated unachievable fuel economy standards and would have forced carmakers to produce vehicles Americans don't want—and for an extra $3,800 per vehicle and negligible environmental benefits.

3. **Engaging with state and local partners**

For decades, EPA has usurped power from state and local governments. Pruitt is reversing this disturbing trend by instituting "cooperative federalism." Under this program, EPA will coordinate with state and local governments, rather than dictating edicts. His track record so far includes his revision of the definition and implementation of Obama's 2015 Waters of the United States rule (WOTUS), which was overly broad and abusive. WOTUS effectively granted to the federal government jurisdiction over every puddle and tiny body of water on private land.

"EPA is restoring states' important role in the regulation of water," Pruitt stated when announcing the end of the rule.

EPA is also establishing Compliance Assistance Centers to "help businesses, colleges and universities, local governments, tribes and federal facilities understand and comply with environmental requirements and save money," and it's introducing Next Generation Compliance standards to "reduce costs and saves time and resources, while improving compliance."

Under Pruitt, the EPA is no longer imposing onerous rules that stifle economic growth and bankrupt the country. Instead, Pruitt is enacting levelheaded regulations that strike a proper balance between protecting the environment and maintaining consumer freedom.

After little more than a year on the job, Pruitt has transformed EPA's culture and restored its mission. The EPA Swamp has been substantially drained, a huge setback for power-grabbing leftists. And it's primarily for that reason the left and mainstream media have succumbed to attacking Pruitt's character. Just imagine how apoplectic they will get if Pruitt is allowed to continue his record of success in the years ahead!

Gulf Live

http://blog.gulflive.com/mississippi-press-news/2018/04/epa_administrator_signs_1076_m.html

EPA Administrator Signs $107.6 Million Memorandum to Clean Mississippi Phosphates Site

By: Tyler Carter, 4/19/18

The Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt signed an Action Memorandum for $107.6 million on Wednesday, accelerating the cleanup of the former Mississippi Phosphates Corporation (MPC) Site in Pascagoula.

In January, Pruitt and his team added MPC to its Superfund Priorities List after the agency announced in August 2017 their intentions to recommend the site for the list because of the environmental hazard it posed to marine and human life in the City of Pascagoula.

The Action Memorandum signed Wednesday selects a $71.6 million cleanup that will take place from 2018 through 2020, plus $36 million for ongoing wastewater treatment during the three-year cleanup period.

"In just over a year, EPA has taken multiple important actions to accelerate the remediation of the Mississippi Phosphates Superfund Site," Pruitt said. "This memo reflects my commitment to addressing Superfund sites as quickly and safely as possible to ensure human health and economic activity in the surrounding areas are fully protected."

The cleanup plan identified in the Action Memorandum focuses on the closure of the East Gypsum Stack and the North Ponds at the West Gypsum Stack. The cleanup will eliminate storage of more than 500 million gallons of contaminated water on site and reduce the volume of water requiring treatment by an estimated 98 percent.

Design of the closure system is underway. EPA is evaluating the possible use of local dredge spoil to cap and close the East Gypsum Stack.

In response to comments received during the public comment period, EPA is also evaluating the use of engineered geosynthetic turf products as an alternative cap/cover system in its design.

The MPC Site is a former diammonium phosphate fertilizer plant that began operation in the 1950s. The facility ceased operations in December 2014 under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, leaving more than 700,000,000 gallons of acidic, nutrient-rich wastewater stored at the facility.

The wastewater--if improperly discharged--may be toxic to fish and other forms of marine life and can also cause algal blooms. Previous releases of untreated wastewater from the site (before EPA took over wastewater treatment operations) resulted in fish kills.

EPA currently oversees wastewater treatment at a rate of approximately 2-4 million gallons per day--at a cost of over $1 million per month--due to the high volume of wastewater requiring treatment. EPA has expended approximately $17 million to treat wastewater at the site.

EPA assumed control of wastewater treatment operations at the former MPC fertilizer facility once the MPC Environmental Trust, which owns the property, ran out of funds in February 2017.

"Pascagoula has lived with this catastrophic issue for years with no response," Mayor Dane Maxwell said. "Since President Trump took office and under Administrator Pruitt not only have we had a response, but it has been from the highest levels. Making Mississippi Phosphates cleanup a priority is very important for the entire Gulf Coast."

Daily Caller

http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/19/associated-press-scott-pruitt-travel/

Associated Press Publishes Misleading Headline on Scott Pruitt's Travel Arrangements

By: Jason Hopkins, 4/19/18

The Environmental Protection Agency is pushing back against The Associated Press' reporting on Administrator Scott Pruitt's private travel.

The AP released a report on Wednesday titled: "EPA chief sat in coach when not flying on taxpayer's dime." The headline — and the opening lede — suggested that the leader of the EPA makes more economical decisions when taking personal flights, as opposed to his travel when conducting official business.

Pruitt has received criticism for flying first class on the taxpayers' dime, an arrangement he says is made for security reasons. The AP story centered on how Pruitt flew coach on Southwest Airlines when he made personal trips to Oklahoma in August and September.

However, there is one major detail included about Southwest Airlines: They do not offer first-class travel. This detail was included in the body of the AP article, but the headline and angle of the report framed Pruitt as a hypocrite when it comes to personal travel.

"Despite their misleading headline, the Associated Press knowingly reported that that there are no premium-class seats on Southwest Airlines," read a Wednesday statement from the EPA. "The fact is: Administrator Pruitt consistently follows the same security measures, which is not about sitting in first class but sitting near the front of the plane. It's impossible to fly first-class on Southwest Airlines, however Administrator Pruitt always sat in the first few rows of the aircraft."

This was not the only detail the EPA took issue with. The AP claimed on Twitter that it confirmed their story with the agency.

However, EPA spokesperson Jahan Wilcox said this tweet is false and that the agency never confirmed their report. "The same security procedures are followed whether Administrator Pruitt is on official or personal travel," the official statement provided to the AP read. The statement neither confirmed nor denied the story.

Pruitt, who has racked up thousands of dollars in travel expenses since taking the helm of the EPA, has received immense criticism for taking first-class flights on taxpayer dollars. Democrats and other Pruitt opponents have used news of his expensive flights to push for his ouster. The EPA, however, maintains more expensive flights are necessary for his safety.

Pruitt has been the target of aggression and profane language at airports since leading the agency.

"He was approached in the airport numerous times, to the point of profanities being yelled at him and so forth," Henry Barnet, director of the EPA's Office of Criminal Enforcement, told Politico in a Feb. 15 report. "We felt that based on the recommendation from the team leader, the special agent in charge, that it would be better suited to have him in business or first class, away from close proximity from those individuals who were approaching him and being extremely rude, using profanities and potential for altercations and so forth."

Tulsa World

http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/usworld/scott-pruitt-showed-penchant-for-travel-drivers-

even-before-being/article_4aa07e53-b8ff-5241-a223-58d1829655d2.html

Scott Pruitt Showed Penchant for Travel, Drivers Even Before Being Names EPA Head

By: Ellen Knickmeyer and Sean Murphy, 4/20/18

Scott Pruitt's penchant for travel and concerns about security were notable even before he became head of the Environmental Protection Agency, according to newly obtained records that show that as Oklahoma's attorney general he frequently traveled out-of-state for appearances before conservative groups and used an office investigator as a driver.

As Oklahoma's top prosecutor from 2011 to 2016, Pruitt was raising his profile nationally as a conservative in favor of rolling back regulation and federal authority.

Records obtained by The Associated Press show Pruitt traveled extensively as Oklahoma's attorney general, taking 18 out-of-state trips in 2015 and 2016, for example, including 11 to Washington, D.C. Although some travel expenses were reimbursed by conservative think tanks where Pruitt spoke, records show no sign of reimbursement for several trips involving appearances before them.

Immediately after taking office as attorney general, Pruitt started using a full-time driver who chauffeured him in a large black SUV from his home in Tulsa to the office in Oklahoma City, about 90 miles away.

Pruitt's daily calendars show the driver — variously shown on the records as "driver" or "agent" — was often an office investigator, a licensed law enforcement officer who typically investigates crimes for the agency.

"It appears he created his own security detail," said Gary Jones, Oklahoma's state auditor and a fellow Republican.

As EPA administrator, Pruitt has been under intense scrutiny since it was first revealed last month that he had stayed last year in a bargain-priced Capitol Hill condo tied to a fossil-fuels lobbyist. Multiple investigations have been launched by government watchdogs and congressional committees looking into luxury travel expenses, outsized security spending and massive raises awarded to political appointees.

Lincoln Ferguson, a former spokesman for the attorney general who now serves as a senior adviser to him at the EPA, said if Pruitt's out-of-state travel was strictly for political purposes, it would have been paid for by campaign funds. But travel records show the trips were arranged through a state-contracted travel agency, and few show any reimbursement was made.

In Oklahoma, Pruitt routinely made the three-hour commute from his home in Tulsa to the state Capitol in Oklahoma City during the working day, according to the calendars.

The entry for Dec. 7, 2015, for example, shows the entry: "8:15 to 9:45, depart Tulsa for OKC" and "3:30-5, depart OKC for Tulsa."

That was despite Pruitt expanding his office's Tulsa branch during his time. The AP reported in December 2016 that the move to bigger, pricier offices in Tulsa were part of a 40 percent increase in his office's expenses as attorney general. Pruitt also added nearly 60 employees to the attorney general's office.

By contrast, Pruitt's predecessor, Democrat Drew Edmondson, who held the attorney general post for 16 years, said he typically used a four-door sedan and drove himself to events.

Ferguson, the senior adviser to Pruitt, said "there was no wasted time" on Pruitt's commutes between Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

"He was working, reviewing documents, on the phone," Ferguson said.

Overall spending on travel by Pruitt's office averaged about $270,000 a year in his last four years as Oklahoma's attorney general, up 26 percent from his predecessor's final year in office. The figures do not include a total for Pruitt's trips alone. The attorney general's office spent $201,000 on travel during his predecessor's last year in the office.

The calendars are heavily redacted and entire days are blacked out.

But the records do show Pruitt frequently traveled to Washington to speak to groups including the Federalist Society; the Club for Growth, a free-enterprise advocacy group; and an anti-abortion rally. He also made similar appearances elsewhere, such as one before the small-government FreedomWorks group in Cleveland on "Battling the Regulatory State."

"If it's not state-related, then the state should not be responsible for" the cost, said Jones, the state auditor. "You can't use any public assets for personal or political reasons."

Records show many of the trips occurred during the workweek, when Pruitt was drawing a state salary of $132,000. Oklahoma broadly bans first-class tickets for state employees. The travel records show only one first-class flight for Pruitt, with a scrawled note on it showing Pruitt's campaign paid for it.

Edmondson, who is now running for governor, said his travel expenses as attorney general typically covered national and regional conventions of attorneys general.

"I think you'll find that his out-of-state travel would far exceed any other attorney general" in Oklahoma, said former Gov. David Walters, a Democrat, who recalled Pruitt speaking before local clubs on topics such as the Obama administration, rather than crime or consumer fraud in Oklahoma.

Conservative groups hosting Pruitt appeared to reimburse most of Pruitt's flights and some

other direct state travel expenses after 2015, and some beforehand.

But on one trip in January 2016, Pruitt billed taxpayers more than $1,000 for a trip to Washington in which he held separate meetings with executives of three conservative think tanks: the APP Foundation, The Federalist Society and Club for Growth. There was no record of reimbursement for that trip. Three weeks later, Pruitt spent the weekend in California for a dinner and a speech to The Federalist Society, which reimbursed the state for his travel.

Associated Press

https://apnews.com/e29d5563fc0c45caa4faa6b3749405a6/Comey-memo:-Trump-complained-about-Flynn's-'judgment-issues

In Comey memos, Trump fixates on 'hookers,' frets over Flynn

By: Mary Clare Jalonick, Eric Tucker, and Chad Day, 4/20/18

In a series of startlingly candid conversations, President Donald Trump told former FBI Director James Comey that he had serious concerns about the judgment of a top adviser, asked about the possibility of jailing journalists and described a boast from Vladimir Putin about Russian prostitutes, according to Comey's notes of the talks obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday night.

The 15 pages of documents contain new details about a series of interactions with Trump that Comey found so unnerving that he chose to document them in writing. Those seven encounters in the weeks and months before Comey's May 2017 firing include a Trump Tower discussion about allegations involving Trump and prostitutes in Moscow; a White House dinner at which Comey says Trump asked him for his loyalty; and a private Oval Office discussion where the ex-FBI head says the president asked him to end an investigation into Michael Flynn, the former White House national security adviser.

The documents had been eagerly anticipated since their existence was first revealed last year, especially since Comey's interactions with Trump are a critical part of special counsel

Robert Mueller's investigation into whether the president sought to obstruct justice. Late Thursday night, Trump tweeted that the memos "show clearly that there was NO COLLUSION and NO OBSTRUCTION."

The president also accused Comey of leaking classified information. The memos obtained by the AP were unclassified, though some portions were blacked out as classified. Details from Comey's memos reported in news stories last year appear to come from the unclassified portions.

In explaining the purpose of creating the memos, which have been provided to Mueller, Comey has said he "knew there might come a day when I would need a record of what had happened" to defend not only himself but the FBI as well.

The memos cover the first three months of the Trump administration, a period of upheaval marked by staff turnover, a cascade of damaging headlines and revelations of an FBI investigation into potential ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. The documents reflect Trump's uneasiness about that investigation, though not always in ways that Comey seemed to anticipate.

In a February 2017 conversation, for instance, Trump told Comey how Putin told him, "we have some of the most beautiful hookers in the world" even as the president adamantly, and repeatedly, distanced himself from a salacious allegation concerning him and prostitutes in Moscow, according to one memo.

In another memo, Comey recounts how Trump at a private White House dinner pointed his fingers at his head and complained that Flynn, his embattled national security adviser, "has serious judgment issues." The president blamed Flynn for failing to alert him promptly to a congratulatory call from a world leader, causing a delay for Trump in returning a message to an official whose name is redacted in the documents.

"I did not comment at any point during this topic and there was no mention or acknowledgment of any FBI interest in or contact with General Flynn," Comey wrote.

By that point, the FBI had already interviewed Flynn about his contacts with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, and the Justice Department had already warned White House officials that they were concerned Flynn was vulnerable to blackmail.

Flynn was fired Feb. 13, 2017, after White House officials said he had misled them about his Russian contacts during the transition period by saying that he had not discussed sanctions. The following day, according to a separate memo, Comey says Trump cleared the Oval Office of other officials, encouraged him to let go of the investigation into Flynn and called him a good guy. Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI and is now cooperating with Mueller's investigation.

The memos reveal that days before Flynn's firing, then-White House chief of staff Reince Priebus asked Comey if Flynn's communications were being monitored under a secret surveillance warrant.

"Do you have a FISA order on Mike Flynn?" Priebus asked Comey, according to the memos, referring to an order under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

Comey said he "paused for a few seconds and then said that I would answer here, but that this illustrated the kind of question that had to be asked and answered through established channels."

Comey's response is redacted on the unclassified memos.

The memos also show Trump's continued distress at a dossier of allegations — compiled by an ex-British spy whose work was funded by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign — examining potential ties between him and his aides and the Kremlin. Comey writes how Trump repeatedly denied to him having been involved in an encounter with Russian prostitutes in a Moscow hotel.

"The President said 'the hookers thing' is nonsense," Comey writes, noting that Trump then

related the conversation with Putin about the “most beautiful hookers.” Comey says Trump did not say when Putin had made the comment.

The documents also include the president’s musings about pursuing leakers and imprisoning journalists. They also provide insight into Comey’s personal and professional opinions. He judges the administration’s travel ban to be legally valid, and he takes a swipe at former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, calling her predecessor, Eric Holder, “smarter and more sophisticated and smoother.”

The memos were provided to Congress earlier Thursday as House Republicans escalated criticism of the Justice Department, threatening to subpoena the documents and questioning officials.

In a letter sent to three Republican House committee chairmen Thursday evening, Assistant Attorney General Stephen Boyd wrote that the department was sending a classified version of the memos and an unclassified version. The department released Boyd’s letter publicly but did not release the memos. The chairmen issued a statement late Thursday saying the memos show that Comey clearly never felt threatened, and Trump didn’t obstruct justice.

Justice officials had allowed some lawmakers to view the memos but had never provided copies to Congress. Boyd wrote that the department had also provided the memos to several Senate committees.

Boyd wrote in the letter that the department “consulted the relevant parties” and concluded that releasing the memos would not adversely affect any ongoing investigations. Mueller is investigating potential ties between Russia and Trump’s 2016 campaign as well as possible obstruction of justice by the president.

Comey is on a publicity tour to promote his new book, “A Higher Loyalty.” He revealed last year that he had written the memos after conversations with Trump.

He said in an interview Thursday with CNN that he’s “fine” with the Justice Department

turning his memos over to Congress.

"I think what folks will see if they get to see the memos is I've been consistent since the very beginning, right after my encounters with President Trump, and I'm consistent in the book and tried to be transparent in the book as well," he said.

Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-hires-giuliani-two-other-attorneys-amid-mounting-legal-turmoil-over-russia/2018/04/19/8346a7ca-4418-11e8-8569-26fda6b404c7_story.html?utm_term=.995f4a24ac4a

Trump hires Giuliana, Two Other Attorneys Amid Mounting Legal Turmoil Over Russia

By: Robert Costa, Josh Dawsey and Rosalind Helderman, 4/19/18

Former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and two other former federal prosecutors joined President Trump's legal team Thursday following weeks of turbulence and struggles to find attorneys who would agree to represent the president in the ongoing federal probe into Russian election interference.

The reshuffling comes at a particularly tense juncture for Trump, who aides said is increasingly frustrated by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's investigation and with the senior officials at the Justice Department.

The entry of Giuliani, an experienced attorney with a combative reputation, immediately raises questions about how Trump will engage with Mueller and the leadership at Justice. Some Trump advisers are concerned that the president could use his -executive authority to close or diminish the special counsel probe, which has spawned a parallel investigation in New York targeting his personal attorney.

"I'm doing it because I hope we can negotiate an end to this for the good of the country and because I have high regard for the president and for Bob Mueller," Giuliani said in an interview Thursday.

Trump said in a statement that Giuliani "wants to get this matter quickly resolved."

In recent days, the president has been regularly venting and speculating to aides about his legal status and the expected timeline for the Russia investigation to end, according to associates briefed on the discussions.

Rudolph W. Giuliani was an ardent supporter of President Trump during the 2016 campaign, and the former New York mayor was considered for the post of attorney general. (Mike Segar/Reuters)

Trump also loudly and repeatedly complained to several advisers earlier this week that former FBI director James B. Comey, former deputy FBI director Andrew McCabe and former Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, among others, should be charged with crimes for misdeeds alleged by Republicans, the associates said.

Although White House officials said Thursday that Trump has not called Justice Department officials or taken any formal action, the persistent grousing has made some advisers anxious, according to two people close to the president. A publicity tour by Comey to promote his book critical of Trump, "A Higher Loyalty," has attracted particular attention from the president, who has disparaged Comey publicly and privately.

Trump also complained this week about Supreme Court Justice Neil M. Gorsuch, saying the judge had proved too liberal in recent cases, according to administration officials who heard about the complaints. Associates said he was incensed that Gorsuch had voted against the administration on an immigration case and said it renewed his doubts that Gorsuch would be a reliable conservative. One top Trump adviser played down the comments as unhappiness with Gorsuch's decision rather than with Gorsuch broadly.

Giuliani, 73, brings a familiarity with several of the legal fronts that Trump is navigating. He is a former associate attorney general and a former U.S. attorney for the Southern

District of New York, which is the office overseeing an investigation of Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen.

Trump counsel Jay Sekulow said Thursday that former federal prosecutors Jane Serene Raskin and Marty Raskin, a couple who manage a Florida-based law firm, have also agreed to join the legal team.

Giuliani is certain to come under intense scrutiny for his role. His own pre-election activities two years ago have been the subject of criticism from Democrats, especially television interviews in which he suggested he had sources providing him inside information about the FBI's investigation of Clinton's private email server when she was secretary of state.

A Justice Department Inspector General report on the department's handling of the Clinton investigations is expected to be released in coming weeks and will probably include results of leak investigations regarding the Clinton probe.

Numerous other challenges face the attorneys who will work alongside Sekulow and counsel Ty Cobb — who have functioned as Trump's legal nucleus for weeks following the resignation of John Dowd, a legal veteran and the team's former leader. Dowd stepped down in March amid clashes over strategy and whether Trump should sit for a voluntary interview with Mueller. The legal team has often been beset by infighting.

"The big question is, how's he going to play with everybody else?" said a lawyer involved with the investigation who was not authorized to speak publicly. "Will he be combative Rudy, or will he play well with Mueller's team? Will he try to walk . . . back from the brink and answer the big question, which is whether the president will sit for an interview? And will Trump listen to him?"

Giuliani declined to say whether Trump has made a final decision on whether to sit for an interview with federal investigators. Trump has been mulling it for weeks, moving away from the idea after the home, offices and hotel room of Cohen were raided this month. Trump reacted angrily, calling it "disgraceful."

“It’s too early for me to say that,” Giuliani replied, when asked whether a Trump interview is unlikely to happen.

Giuliani also declined to discuss whether Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein, who has been under fire from conservatives and oversees the Russia probe, could be fired by the president in the coming weeks.

“I’m not involved in anything about those issues. My advice on Mueller has been this: He should be allowed to do his job. He’s entitled to do his job.”

Giuliani said he formalized his decision in recent days, including over dinner last week at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. Giuliani and Trump spoke Thursday about the legal plan moving forward, along with Sekulow, whom he has known for years and called a friend. He added that he and Cobb also spoke, on Wednesday.

Giuliani — who will take a leave from his law firm, Greenberg Traurig, and is in the midst of a divorce from his third wife — said he would spend a “great deal of time” in Washington working with Trump but would continue to live in New York. He has been frequently been seen holding court at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, dining and drinking with friends and browsing for gourmet cigars.

Trump had considered Giuliani for attorney general and has said in recent weeks he needs a New York-based attorney. Many leading white-collar lawyers, such as former solicitor general Theodore Olson, have declined Trump’s entreaties, often citing conflicts or expressing unease about the high-profile case.

Trump is also known to be a difficult client who does not always listen to his attorneys’ advice, according to lawyers who know him. And Giuliani, once a top adviser, grew frustrated with his treatment during the transition and had receded from the inner circle.

As he has closely monitored cable-news programs chronicling his presidency and the Mueller probe, Trump has swatted away the notion that he cannot attract prominent attorneys. He has also spoken about his desire for a bolstered team and wondered aloud about the damage that Cohen's legal proceedings could bring, according to the associates briefed on the discussions, who requested anonymity to talk about them.

Giuliani's arrival is part of a broader shift in Trump's inner circle toward the core allies and brusque and brutal style that defined his outsider presidential campaign and his business career. Beyond Mueller, aides said everyone and everything around Trump feels liable to become a target for his wrath as he grapples with difficult issues at home and abroad, in Syria and North Korea.

"What we've been seeing with the president is that he is picking A-level people that he knows are experienced but also know him well," said Trump ally Christopher Ruddy, the president and CEO of Newsmax Media, a conservative outlet. "One of the problems in the first year was that people didn't work out because they didn't know him and they didn't have experience for the position."

Trump Tweets