

INTERVIEW OF: DAN COATS, DIRECTOR, DNI

Thursday, June 22, 2017

U.S. House of Representatives,
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:23 a.m., in Room HVC-304, the Capitol, the Honorable Trey Gowdy presiding.

MR. GOWDY: Thank you for your extra time.

DIRECTOR COATS: Thank you for allowing me to do this. In the open SSCI hearing on the budget -- or I guess it was 702 -- 702 -- I mean, the whole thing was turned the other way and so forth, and I didn't think it was appropriate with a 1-day notice -- in an open session, I didn't really feel I could fully answer some questions without it having been distorted by the media. So I did speak to the SSCI at closed session and with the promise it would be -- you know, everything done to prevent any kind of leaks and so forth, and there was a leak.

So, you know, when you say, you know -- so I appreciate you narrowing this down on this, because, you know, for whatever reason, are unexplainable or maybe explainable, it is just hard to keep things -- and then my role is to have some -- a relationship with the President and part of the briefing every day. And if I say something and the media distorts what I say or takes it out of context or even if it is leaked, classified or whatever, it undermines my ability to do what I think my role is in terms of being an adviser and intelligence presenter for the President, which I hope is -- is helping in a positive way, not a negative way. So that is why I appreciate you kind of narrowing it down here because the guys I serve with across the way promised me, "No, no, we have got this totally confined to the pact that there won't be any leaks," and all of a sudden there is a story, and it could only have come from there, so --

MR. GOWDY: Well, Representative Schiff and I have similar backgrounds in the justice system, and leaks are unfair to everyone. It is one of those rare things that is actually unfair to everyone. So you don't need to worry about that here.

DIRECTOR COATS: Yeah. Because I want to give you -- I want to put, you know, what -- everything that has happened in some context here that could be easily misstated if it was leaked out, but I think it will give you a better sense of what the President has said, what we do in those Ovals, et cetera, et cetera.

MR. GOWDY: Well, I want to get to that in a second. I want to start, if I can, from the day that you took the oath of office, have you become aware of any additional evidence -- and when I use the word "evidence," that is a legal term; I think you know what I mean by that, even though it is not an Intelligence Community term -- evidence of collusion, coordination, conspiracy between Russia and Donald Trump himself during the 2016 Presidential campaign?

DIRECTOR COATS: Absolutely not, none.

MR. GOWDY: To you, is there a difference in the words "collusion," "coordination," "conspiracy," or are they all synonyms for one another?

DIRECTOR COATS: I think they are close synonyms, but I think there are some differences.

MR. GOWDY: All right. If I were to separate out those words and ask them individually, have you seen any evidence of any of the three?

DIRECTOR COATS: No, I have not.

MR. GOWDY: Have you seen any evidence of collusion or coordination or conspiracy between the Russians and any member of Trump's official campaign?

DIRECTOR COATS: No, I haven't. I -- totally separate from anybody that has anything in this campaign, I was a Marco Rubio supporter, but the only engagement I had with Donald Trump was when he came to Indiana, and there were crowds of, you know, 4,000 -- or 400 fundraisers, or whatever, you know, two or three times. And relative to the campaign, that is my engagement.

MR. GOWDY: But since you have become --

DIRECTOR COATS: No, I haven't seen any. I have not seen --

MR. GOWDY: You have seen nothing since you took the oath of office in your current position?

DIRECTOR COATS: Correct.

MR. GOWDY: All right. So we have covered Trump and his official campaign. How about those who claim to be in his orbit or sphere, whether they were part of the official campaign or not, collusion, coordination, conspiracy between the Russians and any of them since you have --

DIRECTOR COATS: I have not. I have not. I have not -- you know I -- in my position, I have basically -- I have taken the position: The investigation needs to go on. I don't need to be a part of it at all. But if I had had evidence to suggest that I have seen that, I mean, I would have to expose that if asked by special counsel. I have met with special counsel and told them exactly what I know and what I don't know.

MR. GOWDY: And that is all you can do.

So, to the extent -- if I understand you correctly, you have others within your entity who may or may not have additional information. You yourself are not aware of any additional evidence of collusion, coordination, conspiracy between the Russians and Trump, his official campaign, or those who claim to be in his orbit?

DIRECTOR COATS: That is correct.

MR. GOWDY: All right. Different word, "contact," not coordination, collusion or conspiracy. Are you aware of any contact between President Trump, his official campaign with the Russians that has not been disclosed?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. Only what has been disclosed, what has been publicly presented in the media or disclosed publicly.

MR. GOWDY: Right. Well, there are a lot of media reports that certain members of the administration had additional meetings with Russians that were not disclosed. Do you know of any?

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't. I don't.

MR. GOWDY: On the issue of obstruction, to the very best -- and I know it is hard to recall with great precision, but I need you to recall with as much precision as you possibly can --

DIRECTOR COATS: Right. I will.

MR. GOWDY: -- exactly what President Trump said to you with respect to the investigation.

DIRECTOR COATS: The President, on a number of occasions, has said in the Oval Office to those that were there for the briefing, he has brought up the fact that he thinks his job has been compromised by this assertion that he has had collusion. And he has each time said: I haven't colluded with the Russians, but it is really hampering what I am trying to do. It is saturating the news, that everything else I came here to do has been compromised over this -- over this. And he has repeatedly said: I have had no collusion with the Russians. He mentioned once to me, he said: I did some business over there. I think it -- I think he said it was a hotel, so more than 10 years ago, but he said: In terms of collusion, I haven't -- now, he have never once mentioned that -- or this has come out after Jim Comey's testimony, in my presence, the President has never said Jim Comey has told me that I am not -- you know, there hasn't been any collusion in that.

Jim Comey called me after I was nominated but before I was confirmed and said: Would you like me to brief you on the current status of the investigation?

And I said: No, I wouldn't. I said: First of all, you would be using classified information, and I don't have a security clearance anymore. I am waiting to get my security -- I lost it the day I left the Senate, I said.

And, secondly, I said, I would just prefer not to be in a position where I am attached to anything regarding the investigation when I am not confirmed.

So my -- I was not sworn in until March the 15th. When I was sworn in, then Jim Comey called and said, I would like to come over and bring you up-to-date on this. I said, that is fine. So he came to the office, and he did.

At the time, he said: There is smoke but no fire on the issue of collusion, on -- well, on the Russian. He didn't use the word "collusion." There is smoke but no fire. He said: Right now, I am only targeting -- we are only looking at one person who had some role in the campaign. He said that person is Carter Page, but he said there is -- there is no evidence to indicate at this point that the President had collusion with the Russians.

MR. GOWDY: On the issue of your conversations with President Trump, if I understand you correctly -- and I want you to correct me if I do not -- he has brought it up in the context of thinking that it was a drag or a hindrance to other political aims that he may have --

DIRECTOR COATS: And that he was being targeted by the media, and there was some venting, which at times made me a little bit frustrated. I thought it was taking away from getting him the intelligence that he needed relative to making decisions and so forth. And it -- he -- there was a time when he actually called me on the phone. I happen to know the exact date, because it was

Saturday of the semifinals of the Final Four. I was with my son, his wife, and our grandkids. And we were all watching -- we are really big basketball fans, and we were watching the game together. It was timeout or whatever. There were 5-1/2 minutes left in the game. I thought I have to go out. I have to go out and get on the secure line, because I don't have a SCIF. It is at my son's house. So I had to go out to the detail car and get on the secure line with it.

And it was the President, Saturday night. And I was thinking, boy, I wish he had called at a different time. He is obviously not watching the basketball game. And he raised the question. He said -- I said: People are speaking out saying they have seen the evidence, and there is no link.

He said: I don't know what I should do.

And I said: Mr. President, if you are asking for my advice, I said -- well, first of all, I said, welcome to Washington. I said: You know, this is a town where, whether you are a Republican President or Democratic President, some portion of the media is going to be after you, and obviously, the opposition party is going to be after you. And it is just the way Washington is, number one.

I said: I think you ought -- if you want my advice, I said -- first of all, I said this investigation needs to go forward. The faster it goes -- the less said about it, the more likely it would come to a conclusion.

And I said: Frankly, I think, right now, the best result could be the SSCI because it is operating in a bipartisan fashion. And if you have a result that is favorable and it is bipartisan, it will take the politics out of it. And my advice is to rise above all of this, focus on your job of being President, let the investigation continue, it come to a head, and it is just, unfortunately, something you are going to have to work through.

MR. GOWDY: I have only got a couple more minutes, and then Mr. Schiff is going to go.

DIRECTOR COATS: Okay.

MR. GOWDY: These are my last two questions to you: Did the President ever ask you to publicly state that there was no evidence of collusion between him and his campaign and the Russians?

DIRECTOR COATS: The President, on more than one occasion, said: I have been reading about people who have access to this information that have publicly stated that there is no collusion, both Democrats and Republicans. He mentioned Dianne Feinstein. He mentioned Mark Warner, Richard Burr. He mentioned a whole number of names.

He said: Is that something you can do.

And I said: Mr. President, in my job, that is nothing I think -- I don't think it is appropriate for me to do that. And it was never more than a: Is there something you can do? Is there something you can say? Others have done it. I guess he was thinking: Look, you are the Director of DNI. He was probably in his mind thinking: Hey, you are -- if anybody knows what is going on in intelligence, from an intelligence standpoint, you must be, you say it.

I did not think it was appropriate to do that. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

To tell you the truth, I was sitting there thinking: Here is the President of the United States sitting in an empty White House. His wife is in New York. His family is in New York. On a Saturday night, that has got to be a lonely thing to do.

MR. GOWDY: Well, he should have flipped on and watched the NCAA Final Four and left you alone.

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. GOWDY: Last question before Adam goes. In any of your conversations with President Trump, any of them, did you feel any influence at all, even a scintilla of influence, to alter the direction or trajectory of the investigation?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. Not -- the way you stated that, no. I was uncomfortable at times because I didn't think he should be asking me could I say something publicly. But in terms of having anything to do with trying to alter the -- I knew -- I knew absolutely I could not do that, should not do that, would not do that.

MR. GOWDY: That is a separate question from whether or not he was trying to influence you. I get that you did not become influenced, but did you believe that he was attempting to influence any aspect of your investigation in any of the conversations you had with him?

DIRECTOR COATS: To the very, very best of my recollection -- and I don't mean that as trying to -- trying to, you know, a legal way out at all, I have -- I cannot come to the conclusion that he was asking me to alter or in any way influence the outcome of it.

I -- he probably thought that if I would say something publicly, it might have an impact just as I thought what had been said by both Democrats and Republicans who were -- had access to all the information would have an influence or could have an influence.

MR. SCHIFF: Thank you, Director.

I know this puts you in a difficult, uncomfortable position. I appreciate you sitting down with us.

You mentioned the telephone conversation. And what was the date? You

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said you knew the date.

DIRECTOR COATS: That was the 25th. I went back. I asked my staff. I said, when was the Final Four? So I know that was the 25th.

MR. SCHIFF: March 25th.

DIRECTOR COATS: Uh-huh.

MR. SCHIFF: And when you had the conversation with the President, you were in the car with your security detail?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. They got out of the car.

MR. SCHIFF: They got out of the car. So you were alone in the car?

DIRECTOR COATS: Uh-huh.

MR. SCHIFF: And after the conversation, did you discuss the conversation with others when you returned to the office?

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't think so. I might have mentioned something. I went back to -- actually, I didn't even mention it to my family. I just said: The President wanted somebody to talk to on a Saturday night. I wish he had been watching the game.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you discuss, though, what the President had asked you to do with members of your staff when you returned to work?

DIRECTOR COATS: I had mentioned to my staff that the President -- that I was a little bit frustrated over the President wanting me to issue that public statement.

MR. SCHIFF: The statement being that you didn't think there was any evidence of collusion?

DIRECTOR COATS: Uh-huh.

MR. SCHIFF: That is a yes, right? We have a reporter, so I want to --

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DIRECTOR COATS: That is a yes. Yes, this is exactly -- I hope this is what I said to Trey.

MR. SCHIFF: So who on your staff would you have discussed this with?

MR COATS: My staff, Viraj Mirani. He was my chief of staff at the Senate. And I would have -- I have discussed that with our -- Ted Gistaro, who is our main briefer, guy that stays up all night and gets everything ready for the briefing in the morning.

MR. SCHIFF: Are there any others that you discussed that conversation with?

DIRECTOR COATS: Did I discuss that with you?

MR. BROOKER: Just in preparation.

DIRECTOR COATS: Just in preparation for this, yes.

MR. SCHIFF: And you mentioned that the conversation --

DIRECTOR COATS: I might have discussed it with my Acting Principal Deputy, Ted Dempsey. I think he did.

MR. BROOKER: Mike Dempsey.

DIRECTOR COATS: Mike Dempsey.

MR. SCHIFF: You mentioned that the conversation made you uncomfortable and that you told the President you didn't feel it was appropriate to do that. What leads you --

DIRECTOR COATS: Well, I felt uncomfortable with the second -- I mean, not -- the first time, I just thought -- well, I guess I did feel a little bit uncomfortable, but to have him ask me again, I felt a little bit uncomfortable about answering it.

MR. SCHIFF: So the phone call was the second time he had asked you to publicly state there was no collusion?

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DIRECTOR COATS: No. I don't recall the phone call. This was a kind of a pull-aside at the -- before the Oval or after the Oval. I don't recall whether or not he asked me that. I know the only thing he has asked me is that issue. I can't 100 percent say that he asked me that on that phone call, no.

MR. SCHIFF: I am not sure that I am following. You said that the -- it made you uncomfortable the second time he asked you to push back on the collusion issue. What was the first time he had asked you?

DIRECTOR COATS: Well, let's see. My first Oval would have been -- let's see. I was confirmed -- I was sworn in on the 15th.

MR. BROOKER: On a Thursday. And next week was your first Oval.

DIRECTOR COATS: Next week. So March --

MR. BROOKER: Probably the 20th, 21st.

DIRECTOR COATS: Eighteenth, somewhere in there.

MR. SCHIFF: So he pulled you aside on an Oval Office meeting.

DIRECTOR COATS: No. He was -- he came in. He was talking about that. He looked at me and said: Is that something you can say?

MR. SCHIFF: So the first time that he raised the Russia investigation with you was at the Oval Office in the pull-aside where he asked if you could publicly state that there was no evidence of collusion?

DIRECTOR COATS: That is my recollection of the first time. The only other interactions I have had with the President prior to that was a -- in the Oval Office: Congratulations. Great to have you onboard, so forth and so on. And it was at that point -- I hadn't mentioned this yet. It was at that point that he was -- and this was in January after I had been nominated -- he talked to me about how unfair he thought it was that New York briefing, that he was pulled aside

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and -- by the Director and given this additional -- this annex information relative to the prostitution issue.

MR. SCHIFF: The Steele memo?

DIRECTOR COATS: The Steele memo, yes.

And he said -- he said, I think this had -- may have been had -- I am speculating if it had anything to do with the firing of Comey or not. I don't know. But he said that -- he said, can you imagine -- he said -- first of all, he said -- I don't know why he said this to me. Maybe because it is my background, my faith background, or whatever, I don't know. Mike Pence recruited me to the job. So maybe he just -- he said: I want to -- I swear to you on the soul of my son, I had nothing to do with that prostitution. And for them to take me aside and raise that issue and then have it leaked, he said, how would you like it if -- how do you go home and talk to your wife when it is plastered all over the place that you were using prostitutes in Russia and you are having your family hear that and having your son hear that? And he just -- he was just really, really impacted.

And I wasn't sure why was he telling me this. Well, he is a new guy. He is coming on, and maybe he -- you know, I don't want him to think I am some kind of guy that would do something like that, so forth and so on. But I could tell --

MR. SCHIFF: So this --

DIRECTOR COATS: I could tell at the time that he was very, very, very upset that that had happened.

MR. SCHIFF: So this was a conversation you had with the President in January in person --

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes. Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: And where --

DIRECTOR COATS: It was a: Drop in the Oval Office, the President wants to congratulate you, and so forth.

MR. SCHIFF: So this was after you had been nominated in a conversation where he was congratulating you?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: So he brings up the Steele dossier with you.

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: And he was very upset?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: He was briefed on it by Director Comey?

DIRECTOR COATS: Right.

MR. SCHIFF: At that conversation, did he ask you to make a public statement?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. No. This came much later. That was all that happened. And then I left the Oval Office, because I wasn't, you know, confirmed yet.

MR. SCHIFF: So, in that first conversation with the President about the Russia investigation, that was the only issue that he raised with you, the Steele dossier, and Director Comey raised it with him?

DIRECTOR COATS: That is correct.

MR. SCHIFF: Now, you mentioned that there was another conversation you had prior to the phone call that you took in your secure car --

DIRECTOR COATS: Uh-huh.

MR. SCHIFF: -- where the President asked you to you push back on the collusion issue. When did that second conversation take place?

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DIRECTOR COATS: You have --

MR. SCHIFF: That was the week prior to the phone call you got. I guess it was sometime after your confirmation and prior to the --

DIRECTOR COATS: I can't specifically say whether it was before or after.

MR. SCHIFF: But you were pulled aside at the Oval Office?

DIRECTOR COATS: Well, yeah. On the -- the story that came out on the 22nd, I was frustrated, because we had [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And we really teed this up and so forth. And the President got into us: Yeah, they are still on me and so forth. And I thought, well, this is really -- you know, [REDACTED], and why would he be doing that. And I did recall going back to the office at the EEOB and expressing frustration about -- frustration over the fact that, you know, we are not getting our points across. We teed this all up and trying to get the President ready for this thing.

MR. SCHIFF: So you were having a preparatory meeting with the President [REDACTED]?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: To help prepare him for [REDACTED]

DIRECTOR COATS: Right.

MR. SCHIFF: And he brought up the Russia investigation, and that dominated the conversation?

DIRECTOR COATS: Well, yeah, the early parts of it, yes.

MR. SCHIFF: And who was present in the room when you had the Russia conversation with the President? [REDACTED]

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DIRECTOR COATS: No. No. No. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The -- I was there. I think Mike Pompeo was there. I mean, the regular crew is -- is me, [REDACTED], Mike Pompeo when he is in town and I am in town, we are both there, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I guess, comes in on some of those, and every once in a while, [REDACTED] comes in and just sits in the back, doesn't participate, and the [REDACTED] probably half the time.

MR. SCHIFF: So you are there to discuss [REDACTED]. And at some point, does he ask [REDACTED] to leave the room?

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: So, in the presence of [REDACTED], he will raise the Russia investigation?

DIRECTOR COATS: Correct.

MR. SCHIFF: And what did he say?

DIRECTOR COATS: Same thing. Same thing every time. I mean: I can't do this job. They are -- I don't know what precipitated it. It might have been something in the media that morning. I can't -- I don't recall, but he just -- just was still showing his frustration over the inability to do his job and the fact that this thing just wasn't going to go away and that a lot of it was -- was conjured up by the media. I mean, it was just sort of a venting.

MR. SCHIFF: And during that meeting, did he ask you and Director Pompeo to publicly push back on the collusion issue?

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't recall doing that, no. At that meeting, I don't recall that.

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MR. SCHIFF: Did he make any ask of you during that meeting?

DIRECTOR COATS: Not to my recollection, no.

MR. SCHIFF: Did he raise Michael Flynn during that meeting?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. See, the Flynn thing was over before I ever got there. I mean, it was --

MR. SCHIFF: Well, Flynn had been fired by then, correct?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: But the issue of whether Flynn was going to be investigated or prosecuted wasn't over, right?

DIRECTOR COATS: It was not over, no.

MR. SCHIFF: Did he raise Michael Flynn during that meeting?

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't recall. I don't think so.

MR. SCHIFF: Did he ask you to intervene with Director Comey?

DIRECTOR COATS: He never asked me to do anything with Michael Flynn at all.

MR. SCHIFF: So he never asked you to suggest to Director Comey or anyone else that the Flynn case should be dropped?

DIRECTOR COATS: He has never asked me to talk to Comey about anything.

MR. SCHIFF: Has he asked you -- has he raised Michael Flynn with you in any way?

DIRECTOR COATS: Not with me personally. In a joint group, he may have mentioned Flynn. I can't recall that he had. But I can't separate what I read in the paper, maybe early March, from, you know, when I was there. I don't recall him talking about Flynn. I think Flynn was out of the picture at that time or at least

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when I was there.

MR. SCHIFF: So I just want to be very clear about this. Did the President ever ask you to take any action, make any recommendation, speak to anyone else concerning Michael Flynn?

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: Did the President ever raise with you his thoughts on whether the investigation of Flynn should go forward?

DIRECTOR COATS: He did not.

MR. SCHIFF: Did the President ever speak to you about Michael Flynn in any way?

DIRECTOR COATS: I have no recollection of that.

MR. SCHIFF: After the meeting --

DIRECTOR COATS: I mean, personally, I knew that I was -- I was glad that the Flynn issue was out of the way before I got there.

MR. SCHIFF: After the meeting in the Oval Office that was a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] did you discuss that meeting with -- was it Mike --

MR. BROOKER: Dempsey.

DIRECTOR COATS: Dempsey.

MR. SCHIFF: -- Dempsey or Ted Gistaro?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes. Yes, that was the day I was frustrated. And I don't know if my chief of staff was with me or not, but I did go back to that day -- he would have been back at the office. I did -- I am sure I expressed it to Ted maybe on the way out of the White House. We were walking out together.

MR. SCHIFF: So Ted was at the White House as well?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes. Ted, he is the briefer -- he was the briefer who brought the [REDACTED] in.

MR. SCHIFF: So he would have been in the room for the discussion?

DIRECTOR COATS: Right.

MR. BROOKER: Can I just have one second?

[Discussion off the record.]

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes. Okay. You are right.

On the [REDACTED], that is when he asked Mike Pompeo and I to stay in the room. He had been in -- so I may have gotten my meetings mixed up there, because what I was frustrated over was that -- that maybe -- that he had said something early on. So, whether others in the room heard that or not, I don't know.

But when he asked Mike and I to stay, I don't remember what he talked about. I am almost certain it had nothing to do with that.

I mean, more often than not, he asked somebody to stay behind: Tell me more about Afghanistan, or what do you really think about this

MR. SCHIFF: I just want to make sure we get clarity on this.

DIRECTOR COATS: Yeah. And I can understand why it is confusing. It is confusing to me.

MR. SCHIFF: There were more than one Oval Office meetings where the subject of Russia investigation came up?

DIRECTOR COATS: There were more than one. That is correct. Usually, it is the regular crew that is in there, and the President, I think, just seized this as a place to express his feelings.

MR. SCHIFF: So let's talk about -- let's get clarity on the [REDACTED] meeting, and then let's talk about the other Oval Office meeting.

So the [REDACTED] meeting, I guess we can try to look at the calendar, figure out when the [REDACTED]. Was it the day before the President's visit or --

DIRECTOR COATS: I think we calculated that it was the 22nd -- we went back and confirmed it, right? The 22nd of March. The call came in on --

MR. SCHIFF: So the meeting in the Oval Office on the 22nd, when the President brought up the Russia investigation, who was present, and what did he say?

DIRECTOR COATS: Present at that meeting would have been myself, Mike Pompeo. I thought he was there. I don't think the [REDACTED] was at that meeting. Ted Gistaro, the one who assembles the brief, would have been there. And I don't recall who might have been sitting -- we were facing the President like I am facing you. Back there, sometimes, [REDACTED] is sitting on the couch. [REDACTED] was sitting on the couch. And at the front -- so it would be me, McMaster, [REDACTED], and then -- I don't think the [REDACTED] was there -- and Mike Pompeo

MR. SCHIFF: So, at that meeting, did the President raise the Russia issue in the presence of all the others, or did he excuse others from the room and talk with you and Director Pompeo alone?

DIRECTOR COATS: I believe -- my recollection is he raised it on the way in. I don't know -- I mean, I was sort of -- I have always found the end over here. My recollection is that we were talking about subjects nonrelated to why we had brought the [REDACTED] in. And I thought, my gosh, they are sitting here through all of this. And it was like some stream of consciousness, and there may have been references to it.

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I do remember that I was -- my frustration was over the fact that we were not able to accomplish what we were trying to accomplish.

MR. SCHIFF: So it sounds, then, like the conversation began on the way into the Oval Office but continued with all the folks you mentioned present, because it displaced a large part of the [REDACTED] discussion.

DIRECTOR COATS: Well, a lot of things displaced it. I mean, the President sometimes talks in a stream of consciousness about a number of different issues, and I just was frustrated over the fact we weren't getting to the essence of it. I can't fully say one way or the other this is exactly what --

MR. SCHIFF: So tell us what exactly he did say concerning the Russia investigation writ large?

DIRECTOR COATS: It is always the same. It is always, you know, the media's got it wrong. They are killing me. You know, there's been no collusion. It keeps me from doing my job.

MR. SCHIFF: And at that meeting, did he ask you to publicly push back on the allegations of collusion?

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: So the other Oval Office meeting that you mentioned, where he did raise the issue of pushing back on collusion, tell me when that took place and who was present for that meeting.

DIRECTOR COATS: I can't tell you, because I don't know what date that that occurred. But he has asked more than once. And I said no, no, no, on that 22nd. I am a little confused in terms of whether he said it that day or afterward. But all I know is -- all I can say is, is that the only thing he has ever said and asked was, is there -- can you add your voice to the other voices that have said publicly

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that there is no collusion?

MR. SCHIFF: You mentioned the President hasn't asked you to do more than push back on the collusion allegation. Has anyone else asked you to do more?

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: Has anyone else --

DIRECTOR COATS: Nobody.

MR. SCHIFF: -- asked you from the White House staff or the President's team or anyone else asked you to weigh in vis-a-vis Michael Flynn in any way?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. No.

MR. GOWDY: I may have heard your last question wrong.

Did you say that he had not been asked to do more than push back, or he had been asked to do more than push back?

MR. SCHIFF: Well, my question was, has anyone asked you whether the President had done more than ask you to push back on the collusion allegation?

MR. GOWDY: Okay.

MR. SCHIFF: And I think your answer was no.

And then I asked -- and clarify if I wasn't clear about this for me -- did anyone else ask you to -- let me start with, did anyone else ask you to push back on the collusion allegation besides the President?

DIRECTOR COATS: No one else has asked me to take any action whatsoever on this issue. The only action that I have been asked to take was by the President relative to affirming that what others have said that I -- I would publicly state what others have said that there is no collusion.

MR. SCHIFF: And so no one else on --

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DIRECTOR COATS: No one else in the White House has ever approached me on that issue.

MR. SCHIFF: And no one else in the White House has approached you?

DIRECTOR COATS: On the transition team, no other individual has ever approached me on that position.

MR. SCHIFF: And none of those that you just mentioned have approached you with any request regarding Michael Flynn?

DIRECTOR COATS: Correct.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you also have a dinner meeting at the White House?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: And did the Russia issue come up during that dinner meeting as well?

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't recall that it did. The issue that came up at that meeting -- first of all, it was -- it was -- the President spent most of the time talking to Rex Tillerson about oil, about trade. We went through NAFTA. We went through a whole list of things. And near the end, the President raised the issue of whether or not he should keep Comey on as FBI Director. And he wanted reactions from those who were at the dinner.

At the dinner was Jeff Sessions, Rex Tillerson, me, and Mike Pompeo. On the other side was Reince -- no. Vice President and Reince, and Steve Bannon. And I think Jared may have come in later in the evening just to say hello or something like that. That is probably of record somewhere. It doesn't matter who was on the other side. The President asked that question and --

MR. SCHIFF: Can you tell us about when this meeting took place?

MR. GOWDY: If we are going to go past 11, I would rather split the time.

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MR. SCHIFF: Oh, well, I am happy to do that.

DIRECTOR COATS: Let me finish this.

MR. BROOKER: And you have to go, sir, to the White House.

MR. GOWDY: I don't mind going longer. I just want us to split the time.

MR. SCHIFF: Here is the thing, I am happy to continue -- either have you come back or meet you out at Liberty Crossing --

DIRECTOR COATS: Listen, I will take a few more minutes. I would like to --

MR. SCHIFF: If you would like to wrap it up, I would too. And I don't have that many more questions.

DIRECTOR COATS: Okay. Let me try to give shorter answers.

At the time, there were reflections relative to what people thought of Comey and his job and so forth.

I didn't say anything until the President said: Does anybody know him personally?

And I said: Mr. President, I do. I said not to an extensive way. I said: But years ago, when I was back -- the first time in the Senate, I said, my son -- no. I am sorry. My grandson was in the Little League, same Little League group as Jim Comey's son was. And there were times when I would slip out of the Senate and be in a ballgame, maybe on a Saturday, and Jim Comey would be there watching his son if the two teams were playing each other. And I said: There were two or three times when we had a chance to stand on the -- by the fence and watch the game and so forth and so on. So I got to know him a little bit.

And then I said: Then I got to know him, because he is testified before the SSCI many, many times. And we always talked about back before he lived in

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McLean and I lived in McLean, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

And he said: Well, what do you think about him?

I said: Well, I have heard what others have said. I said: I think he has done a good job. I think he has been very straight with us in the SSCI.

I said: But my advice to you would be get to better know Jim Comey. I said, you might have -- 2 months, 3 months later, I said: Oh, my gosh, did I trigger the dinner with Comey? But I just said: I think you ought to take your own assessment of it rather than mine or rather than the others and -- before you -- before you made a decision. And he kind of nodded.

MR. SCHIFF: And did he express at that time that he was considering firing James Comey or comment on how he thought Comey was handling the Russia investigation?

DIRECTOR COATS: He didn't say anything about the Russia investigation, in my recollection in that. It was just simply -- just simply, should I make a change? And I personally didn't think he should.

MR. SCHIFF: Did he express what his thinking was in terms of whether he ought to let Comey go?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. He was just asking questions at that point. I think he was asking for advice: What do you know about Comey? What do you think I should do? But it was not resolved in any way. It was just sort of, what are your thoughts.

MR. GOWDY: What was the date of the dinner?

DIRECTOR COATS: We can give you that date. It was in --

MR. BROOKER: In January.

DIRECTOR COATS: -- early January.

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MR. BROOKER: After inauguration but before confirmation.

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: I have a couple more questions, but if you wanted to ask a couple more before --

DIRECTOR COATS: Yeah. Let me -- let me see if we can push it to 11:15. I will try to give shorter answers.

MR. GOWDY: You want to split it, 4 and 4?

MR. SCHIFF: Sure.

MR. GOWDY: All right.

I just want to make absolutely sure that I am clear on this. Regardless of the number of conversations you may have had with President Trump --

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. GOWDY: -- were you ever asked, or did you ever feel like you were being influenced with respect to the investigation into the 2016 hacking of our election?

DIRECTOR COATS: I did not. I did -- I saw it as just what I said, "are you willing to reinforce what others have already said," because I had no knowledge of where the investigation was at that particular point in time.

Later, I had information -- I mean, Jim Comey told me Trump wasn't, but I still didn't think in my position it was appropriate for me to go out and make those statements.

MR. GOWDY: So Director Comey, with whom you had had something of a personal relationship with through Little League baseball, had told you what with respect to President Trump and Russia?

DIRECTOR COATS: Just that the -- when he came out to brief me on the

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investigation to that point, he said: There is smoke but no fire. He said: There is nothing to indicate collusion with the President. He said: We only have one person I am looking at. I am only looking at one person right now in this regard, and that is Carter Page. He said, there may be more down the line, but right now there is nothing to suggest the President colluded with Russia.

MR. GOWDY: And you took the oath of office on what day?

DIRECTOR COATS: March 15.

MR. GOWDY: All right. From March 15 onward, have you seen anything to dispute what Director Comey told you that there is no evidence of collusion?

DIRECTOR COATS: I have not seen anything, because I have purposefully not gotten engaged or asked questions or asked for information or anything. I want to keep completely out of this investigation.

MR. GOWDY: Okay.

MR. SCHIFF: You mentioned, I think --

DIRECTOR COATS: Having told the President: Mr. President, you have just got to let this go, and it needs to come to its conclusion. And it has happened before, and you are going to be far better off in the end if you just let it go.

MR. SCHIFF: Director, you mentioned four meetings or discussions where this Russia decision came up in your discussions with the President, the Oval Office congratulations meeting where the Steele dossier was discussed --

DIRECTOR COATS: Steele, correct. The dinner.

MR. SCHIFF: -- the dinner, the [REDACTED] meeting.

DIRECTOR COATS: Right.

MR. SCHIFF: The phone conversation.

DIRECTOR COATS: Right.

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MR. SCHIFF: Are there any other phone calls or meetings where you discussed broadly what we are calling the Russia investigation, either Comey, Flynn, collusion, any of those topics or any others?

DIRECTOR COATS: [REDACTED]

MR. SCHIFF: [REDACTED]

DIRECTOR COATS: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And we did talk a little bit. And that is when I raised that. I said: You know, I think you had the President sitting in the White House alone, and he just wanted to call, you know, just talk to somebody.

MR. SCHIFF: [REDACTED]

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: [REDACTED]

DIRECTOR COATS: No recollection.

MR. SCHIFF: -- Michael Flynn either?

DIRECTOR COATS: He did not bring up Michael Flynn to my recollection.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you take any notes of your meetings or discussions with the President on this subject?

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't take notes.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you know whether your staff, when you related the meetings back in the office, took any --

DIRECTOR COATS: I don't think so, but I don't know, if they had written anything down. I learned a long time ago in this business not to take notes.

MR. SCHIFF: Now, when you met with James Comey, you got an initial briefing on the Russia investigation where he said there was smoke but not fire, was that the one and only briefing you got on the Russia investigation?

DIRECTOR COATS: That is the one and only, yes. I haven't read the classified version. He had called me: Do you want to hear the classified?

No, I don't. I don't want it until I am confirmed. After that, that is the only one I have had.

MR. SCHIFF: So the briefing he gave you was on the classified assessment of the whole Russia investigation, not just the issue of collusion?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yeah, pretty much. I guess so, yes.

MR. SCHIFF: And at that time, he told you that there was only one person under investigation, and that was Carter Page?

DIRECTOR COATS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: So, if at a later point he had broadened the investigation to include others, that is something that you have not been briefed on?

DIRECTOR COATS: I have not been briefed on.

MR. SCHIFF: So anything that took place after that meeting that may demonstrate evidence on the collusion issue, you would not be aware of?

DIRECTOR COATS: That is correct.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you discuss your testimony today with anyone at the White House?

DIRECTOR COATS: Say that question again.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you discuss what you would be saying today with anyone at the White House --

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

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MR. SCHIFF: -- in preparation for today?

DIRECTOR COATS: To the best of my knowledge, they don't even know -- they, of course, knew I testified before the -- in an open session on the budget with the Senate and declined to talk about anything about the investigation, but I don't even know if they know -- had this meeting or the followup with the Senate.

MR. SCHIFF: And prior to the Senate, your Senate testimony, did they -- did you have any discussions with the White House about what you should not testify to?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. Nobody's ever -- oh, yes. Thank you.

I went to legal counsel, Tom McGann (ph), and before I went to the Senate, and I said, we need -- I spoke with the special counsel. I said: I would like to know whether or not the President is going to exercise executive privilege. I told him it was my preference that they didn't. I said: I don't see any reason why I would not want to testify for this. And then they came back, and they said: Well, we will take that under consideration.

I said: Because I have to meet with the special counsel, and I have to meet with the Senate, and it would be good for us to know whether or not, you know, the President is going to exercise that.

It was my preference that he doesn't, and he said: I will get back to you. He called us back, said: No, we won't do that.

MR. SCHIFF: But they gave you no suggestions as to what the content of your testimony ought to be under the issue?

DIRECTOR COATS: No, not at all.

MR. SCHIFF: If you will give me just one second to review my notes, I

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think we are done.

DIRECTOR COATS: Okay.

MR. SCHIFF: Has the President ever discussed the special counsel's investigation with you or Bob Mueller?

DIRECTOR COATS: No, but -- Bob Mueller hasn't, but he sent three people to my office to interview me.

MR. SCHIFF: No. Has the President discussed with you the investigation that Bob Mueller is conducting?

DIRECTOR COATS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: And I take it the President never asked you to you talk with Director Comey, Rod Rosenstein, acting FBI Director Andy McCabe --

DIRECTOR COATS: No. No.

MR. SCHIFF: -- about the Russia investigation?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. He has never directed me to do anything like that or even talk to me about it.

MR. SCHIFF: And -- the last question. Did you have any discussion with the White House staff about whether any intelligence was shared or compromised in the meeting the President had with Foreign Minister Lavrov and Ambassador Kislyak?

DIRECTOR COATS: No. No.

MR. SCHIFF: There have been public allegations that sources from Israel were -- or information was discussed in that meeting that may compromise Israeli sources of information. Did you get any readout from that meeting about the discussion that took place? Has anyone informed you of the discussion that took place and what intelligence may or may not have been shared?

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DIRECTOR COATS: No. No, stayed out of that one.

MR. SCHIFF: Okay.

Director, thank you.

DIRECTOR COATS: Okay. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:19 a.m., the interview was concluded.]