

World

'Trump made me pay off porn stars to swing poll'

United States
David Charter Washington

Donald Trump knowingly acted illegally to protect his election campaign by directing Michael Cohen to pay hush money days before the poll, the lawyer alleged yesterday.

Cohen, who once said that he would "take a bullet" for Mr Trump, aimed to pin criminal liability on his former boss by claiming that he was "very concerned" to prevent damaging claims of a sexual liaison with the porn star Stormy Daniels from emerging as Americans were preparing to vote.

The allegation poses the clearest legal threat so far to Mr Trump, with the separate investigation into alleged Russian assistance for his campaign yet to point to any direct connection with the president. Asked whether Mr Trump knew that it was wrong to make the payment to Daniels and to earlier one to Karen McDougal, a *Playboy* model, to ensure their silence over alleged affairs, Cohen said: "Of course."

Mr Trump's legal woes deepened further yesterday when prosecutors revealed that they had opened an investigation into the use of the \$107 million inauguration fund and the true source of some of the cash donations amid suspicions that foreign powers may have tried to buy influence.

Cohen, 52, was sentenced this week to three years in jail for crimes including campaign finance fraud, allegedly at the behest of Mr Trump. His claims would appear to meet a test for culpability in a campaign finance case against Mr Trump: the payments exceeded the legal personal maximum, were undeclared and were knowingly calculated to influence the election, according to the lawyer. Mr Trump maintains that Cohen is lying to embarrass him and to avoid a stiffer jail sentence.

A protocol of the Justice Department dating back to the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s holds that a sitting president cannot be indicted when in office. Democrats will have the power to begin impeachment proceedings in the new year — a political trial in Congress —



Michael Cohen, who faces three years in jail, insisted the president was culpable

when they gain the majority in the House of Representatives, but the party is divided about the wisdom of starting a process that would require a two-thirds majority of the Republican-controlled Senate to complete.

"Nothing at the Trump Organisation was ever done unless it was run through Mr Trump. He directed me to make the payments," Cohen told George Stephanopoulos of ABC News in an interview. "You have to remember at what point in time that this matter came about, two weeks or so before the election, post the Billy Bush comments. So, yes, he was very concerned about how this would affect the election."

This is a reference to the recording of Mr Trump making lewd suggestions about women that emerged in early October 2016. Cohen organised a payment of \$130,000 to Daniels, a porn actress whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, as part of an agreement signed days before the 2016 election to keep quiet about an alleged fling with Mr Trump ten years earlier.

In August 2016 the parent company of the *National Enquirer* newspaper reached a \$150,000 deal to pay McDougal, the former *Playboy* model,

ferring to Mr Trump, for whom he worked for 12 years.

Asked why people should believe him, a liar convicted of misleading Congress, Cohen said: "There's a substantial amount of information that corroborates that I'm telling the truth."

He added: "The [justice department] special counsel stated emphatically that the information that I gave to them is credible and helpful. There is a substantial amount of information that they possessed that corroborates the fact that I am telling the truth... I'm done with the lying. I am done with being loyal to Donald Trump... I gave loyalty to someone who, truthfully, does not deserve loyalty."

A poll for CNN yesterday showed that public support for impeachment was down to 43 per cent from 47 per cent in September.

That may change once Robert Mueller, the special counsel in charge of the inquiry into Russian election interference, delivers his report. Mr Mueller — who is thought to be in the concluding stages of an investigation begun 18 months ago which has led to the prosecution of Cohen and several others in Mr Trump's circle — must hand his findings to the US attorney-general, who then decides what to make public. Mr Mueller may be waiting for the new House of Representatives to convene in January because it will have the power to force details into the public domain if the administration attempts to keep them hidden.

Separately, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that US prosecutors in Manhattan had opened an investigation into whether foreigners illegally funnelled donations to Mr Trump's inaugural committee and whether some of the \$107 million it raised was misspent. *The New York Times* said that the inquiry was focused on whether individuals from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates used surrogates to make donations in the hope of buying influence over US policy.

for her story of a ten-month affair which it never published — a tabloid practice known as "catch and kill".

Mr Trump this week tweeted that he had left Cohen in charge of the payments and that he handed over responsibility to ensure that they were legal. "He was a lawyer and he is supposed to know the law," he said. "Those charges were just agreed to by him in order to embarrass the president and get a much reduced prison sentence."

Mr Trump had denied affairs with Clifford and McDougal. "I never directed him to do anything wrong," Mr Trump told Fox News on Thursday. "Whatever he did he did on his own... I never directed him to do anything incorrect or wrong."

In his ABC interview Cohen said that in the McDougal case he "just reviewed the documents" agreed by Mr Trump with David Pecker, head of the *Enquirer*. "The man doesn't tell the truth," Cohen said, re-

Stormy Daniels was paid hush money days before the vote



President could appoint first female chief of staff

David Charter

Elaine Chao, the first Chinese American in a US cabinet, has emerged as a candidate to become President Trump's next chief of staff.

The *Times* understands that Ms Chao, 65, would be the first woman to hold the role of presidential gatekeeper if chosen to succeed John Kelly, the retired US Marines general who leaves at the end of the year after 17 turbulent months.

The White House chief of staff controls access to the president and tries to ensure the smooth running of the West Wing. Ms Chao, who is transportation secretary, is married to Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader

from Kentucky. Ms Chao was born in Taiwan to Chinese parents before coming to America at the age of eight.

She served as secretary of labour under President George W Bush from 2001 to 2009. During the Obama administration she was a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

Her name has emerged during a chaotic process that has seen several people withdraw from the running. The speculation has included Jared Kushner, 37, Mr Trump's son-in-law

and senior adviser. The favourite was Nick Ayers, 36, chief of staff to Mike Pence, the vice-president. He announced last weekend, however, that he would leave the administration at the end of the year to work on the Trump re-election campaign.

Mr Trump said on Tuesday that he was considering "over ten" names. On Wednesday one of those in the frame, Mark Meadows, 59, a congressman, said that he was "fully committed" to serving the people of North Carolina in the House, where he leads the arch-conservative Freedom Caucus.

By Thursday Mr Trump said he had whittled his list down to five finalists. Chris Christie, 56, the former governor of New Jersey, met the president before asking to be removed from consideration. He is thought to be holding out for

a different role. Two Trump loyalists, Steve Mnuchin, 55, the treasury secretary, and Mick Mulvaney, 51, director of the office of management and budget, are reported to have declined to be considered.

Other names still thought to be in the running include David Bossie, 53, the former Trump campaign adviser, Matthew Whitaker, 49, the acting attorney-general, Rick Perry, 68, the energy secretary, and Robert Lighthizer, 71, the trade representative.

In an interview on Thursday, Mr Trump said he wanted a chief of staff who was "strong" and "thinks like I do". Paul Begala, 57, a former adviser to President Clinton, said: "He needs to draw the cameras and the Congress attention away from investigation and on to legislation."



Pagan winged creature carries torch to set Orion aflame while pointing to heavens. Second creature offers Orion a crown. According to Greek mythology, Orion is the brightest constellation.

Scorpion rises from Earth and fatally stings Orion. Zeus turns both of them into stars in the heavens. Orion is given wings to represent his transformation.

A coiled snake at the foot of the mosaic represents the Earth.

Pompeii art offers insight into Romans' links to Egypt

The discovery of a mosaic showing a character that is half-man, half-scorpion with butterfly wings and flaming hair has been hailed as a rare opportunity to learn about Pompeii's fascination with astrology and its trading links with Egypt (Tom King in Rome writes).

Found during excavations this year, the character had never been seen before in classical iconography and initially stumped experts. However, the site's director, Massimo Osanna, said yesterday that he had unlocked the mystery: it is Orion.

"In Greek mythology, Orion was a giant and a hunter who announced that he would hunt every animal on Earth, incurring the wrath of the goddess Gaia who sent a scorpion to kill him," he said. Zeus, god of the sky and thunder, then transformed the scorpion and Orion into constellations in the heavens, and Orion is identified today by the three stars on his belt.

"A snake represents the ground from which the scorpion emerged, the sword the man carries is typical of depictions of Orion and the wings represent his transformation," Mr Osanna said, adding: "It's an amazing find — there are few depictions of Orion in the classical world and never with the scorpion as a constellation."

The floor mosaic was found during digs that have turned up stunning portraits and lewd graffiti. The mosaic and the house it is in date back to the 2nd century BC, suggesting that it was about 200 years old when the city was buried by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The mosaic indicates the cultural influence on Pompeii of Alexandria, in Egypt, Mr Osanna said. "Astronomy was important in Alexandria and they thought Orion was the brightest constellation, which is why in the mosaic he is being lit by a torch carried by a winged creature, who is indicating the way to the stars," he said.

Cultural and commercial links between Alexandria and Pompeii were strong, possibly thanks to trade flowing through the free port on the Greek island of Delos, Mr Osanna said. "This mosaic speaks to us of the ties across the Mediterranean then."

Stasi ID card ignites interest in Putin's past Page 44

Oscars desperately seeking host to replace Kevin Hart



Terrorist's death gives gilets jaunes free rein to riot

France
Adam Sage Paris

France's yellow-vest protesters yesterday threatened a fifth weekend of demonstrations as they dismissed government pleas to abandon their movement following the return of terrorism.

Police chiefs warned that resources were being stretched to the limit as they deployed 89,000 officers across France to prepare for further disturbances. Police joined ministers in appealing for calm after the terror attack on Christmas markets in Strasbourg which killed four people and injured 11, one of whom is brain dead. The fourth victim was identified yesterday as an Italian journalist named Antonio Megalizzi, 28.

Investigators are seeking to determine whether Chérif Chekatt, 29, the killer, who was shot dead by police on Thursday after a 48-hour manhunt, had accomplices. Seven people have been arrested, including Sami Chekatt, 34, his brother, who was detained in Algeria after France issued an arrest warrant for him. French officers describe him as a radical Islamist whom they suspect of encouraging or helping to plan the attack.

Amid a resurgence of Islamist terror, police chiefs are concerned that another weekend of riots against President Macron will push law enforcement to breaking point. Noting that officers were applauded by crowds of on-lookers in Strasbourg after shooting Chekatt, they want an end to attacks on the police.

Christophe Castaner, the interior minister, agreed. He said: "I can't stand the idea that today we are clapping our police officers and that tomorrow some people will think it's a good idea to throw stones at them." He said that at about the same time as Chekatt was shot dead by three officers in Strasbourg, a group of yellow-vest protesters were attacking a police car with a metal bar in Avignon, southern France.

Despite mounting political and police pressure to wind down the protests — and an emergency €9 billion

worth of sweeteners from Mr Macron — hardline protesters insist that they will continue. Several thousand have posted messages on Facebook to say they will be in Paris today, and many more have pledged to block roads, shopping centres and warehouses elsewhere in France.

A Paris councillor who has been in touch with intelligence agencies said they had little idea of the likely scale of the protests. Police will deploy 8,000 officers on the city's streets. A similar operation last weekend failed to prevent protesters from looting 144 businesses, mainly shops, and vandalising a further 102 in Paris alone.

Riots also broke out in cities such as Toulouse and Bordeaux, where Alain Juppé, the mayor, denounced scenes of "urban guerrilla warfare". The worst of the violence this weekend is likely to be in the provinces.

The yellow vest movement began as a campaign against rising fuel duties before turning into a general expression of anger and frustration among lower-middle class provincial France. Mr Macron has caved in to many of the demands and offered tax cuts and welfare benefit rises, shattering his pledge to stand firm against the protests that have derailed many of his predecessors.

Yet hardline yellow vests are demanding more, notably a reform of French democratic institutions. Priscilla Ludosky, who helped to spark the movement with an online petition against fuel taxes, published a statement calling for "popular referendums" to approve or to strike down legislation and for transformation of the Senate into a "citizens' assembly" whose members would be drawn out of a hat.

Divisions, however, have appeared within a movement that emerged on Facebook and that has no official leadership. Benjamin Cauchy, another of the original instigators, urged yellow vests to avoid protests this weekend after the Strasbourg terror attack.

"We realise that the forces of law and order must focus on critical points during the Christmas period," he said.

Waiters act quickly to save lives

Analysis

When a terrorist attacked Strasbourg this week the city's waiters acted quickly to save diners and passers-by (Adam Sage in Paris writes).

Doors were shut, lights were turned off and hundreds of people were taken into the basements and rear rooms of bars and restaurants.

The response is seen as a consequence of government efforts

to educate people on how to deal with a terrorist attack since Paris was targeted in 2015. The advice, contained in posters put up in schools and town halls, was sent to restaurants in the city by the local branch of the hotel, restaurant and bar owners' union.

The advice was simple: escape if you can and hide if you cannot, lock doors and keep away from windows. As Chérif Chekatt shot shoppers on Tuesday, dozens of

restaurants followed the advice, no doubt saving many lives.

At Le Poids Plume waiters told the 20 or so diners and 20 passers-by to go into the basement. They drew the curtains, turned off the lights and waited to be told it was safe to leave until after midnight.

"It was a natural instinct for the staff here to do that," said Marilyne Lefebvre, the owner. "We are a service industry and we are on the ground all the time."