



Excerpts from Joint Deposition

Jennifer Williams
Special Adviser to the Vice President for Europe and Russia

Conducted on November 7, 2019

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Williams testified that, following plans for Vice President Pence to attend Ukrainian President Zelensky's inauguration, "the President asked the Vice President not to attend".

Q: Can you explain why Vice President Pence did not attend, ended up not attending?

A: My understanding was on May 13th, at some time in the morning, I received a phone call from our chief of staff's office from one of my colleagues saying that the Vice President would not be attending the inauguration.

Q: And who was that colleague?

A: I believe it was the chief of staff's assistant.

Q: And why wasn't Vice President Pence going to attend? Had he received further direction from somebody at the White House?

A: My understanding from my colleague—and, again, I wasn't there for the conversation—was that the President asked the Vice President not to attend.

On May 13, 2019, President Trump instructed Vice President Pence not to attend President Zelensky's inauguration. (Page 36-38, 40)

A: So shortly after the President's April 21st conversation, I learned through email from our chief of staff that the President had asked the Vice President to attend the inauguration. Again, at that time the date of the inauguration had not yet been set.

....

Q: And do you know who recommended that Vice President Pence attend the inauguration, whose idea it was?

A: My understanding from our chief of staff, Marc Short, was that the President asked the Vice President to attend shortly after the President's phone call with President Zelensky on April 21st.

Q: And was the Vice President amenable to that? Was he enthusiastic about going to show support for Zelensky, or what was his attitude?

A: I wasn't present when he was asked specifically, so I can't really speak to that. But I can say that in the phone call that the Vice President had 2 days later, obviously, the issue of the inauguration came up as well, and the Vice President accepted that invitation from President Zelensky, and looked forward to being able to attend, again, if the dates worked out.

Q: Can you explain why Vice President Pence did not attend, ended up not attending?

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Q: And who was that colleague?

A: I believe it was the chief of staff's assistant.

Q: And why wasn't Vice President Pence going to attend? Had he received further direction from somebody at the White House?

A: My understanding from my colleague—and, again, I wasn't there for the conversation—was that the President asked the Vice President not to attend.

...

Q: Were you ever give a reason for the President's change of mind on this?

A: No.

Q: And up until the directive was given for the Vice President not to attend, were preparations being made for the Vice President to attend?

A: They were. We were making preparations. But, again, since the date hadn't actually been selected, it was very preliminary. We hadn't gotten very far.

Q: But it was the Vice President's intention, assuming that it worked with his calendar, to follow the President's recommendation that he attend?

A: That's right.

In May 2019, Ms. Williams flagged for the Vice President news reports that Rudy Giuliani was advocating for Ukrainian investigations into the 2016 election and Burisma. (Page 26-28)

Q: When did you first become aware of Rudy Giuliani's activities in Ukraine?

A: Through media reporting, I want to say probably early in April, not long after I had started my position. I was aware of some interviews that he had given regarding his concerns about corruption and about things going on in Ukraine, but, again, it was all just from open source reporting.

Q: Were you aware of his tweets that he was sending out around that time?

A: I don't follow him on Twitter, so I hadn't seen them myself, but I had seen them reported in the media.

Q: And did you—did there come a time when you became aware that he was advocating for Ukraine to initiate certain investigations?

A: I think the first media report I recall that was specific to particular investigations was an interview he did with a Ukrainian outlet towards the end of May. I want to say May 28th. And I saw that in a written summary from our Embassy colleagues who do an English language translation of Ukrainian news on a daily basis. And I noted that in that interview that Mr. Giuliani had given, he referenced particular investigations that he would like to see the Ukrainians undertake.

Q: And which investigations were those?

A: I believe they related to the 2016 election, and what role, if any, Ukraine may have played in that, as well as looking into the situation with former Vice President Biden's son and Burisma.

...

Q: Did you flag those—the news articles for the Vice President?

A: I had flagged the May 28th Ukrainian interview—Ukrainian media interview in a daily update for the Vice President, but had no personal conversations with him about it.

On July 3, 2019, Ms. Williams learned of the hold on Ukraine security assistance, but she never received any further explanation for it. (Page 55, 115-117)

Q: When did you first learn of the hold on Ukraine security assistance—U.S. security assistance to Ukraine?

A: I believe it was July 3rd.

Q: And how did you learn about it?

A: I saw an email—or, I suppose, a written update, electronically, that was drafted by Alex Vindman, reporting—internally reporting that the State Department had notified him that OMB was not clearing the latest round of congressional notification documents to move the next tranche of security assistance for Ukraine.

...

Q: And did you get any more color on that at the July 23 PCC meeting that you attended?

- A: Not really. The OMB representative at that meeting essentially just conveyed to the group that the guidance they had received from the White House chief of staff was to continue to hold the assistance without further explanation.
- Q: But the unanimous view of all the agencies that participated in the PCC was that the hold should be lifted and the aid should flow to Ukraine?
- A: That's correct.
- ...
- Q: But at that point in time, hadn't the Department of Defense already certified that the assistance was, in fact, effective and should be provided to Ukraine?
- A: Yes, they did.
- Q: Yeah. I mean, Ukraine had been invaded by Russia. They were literally fighting a hot war against Russia, and this military assistance was going directly to help Ukraine fight the Russians. Isn't that accurate?
- A: Correct. And DOD also made the point that this assistance primarily goes to U.S. defense contract companies to implement.
- Q: So the money was not only benefiting Ukraine, but it was also indirectly benefiting U.S. companies, which is also a concern of President Trump, correct?
- A: That was a message that DOD was conveying to help make their point.
- Q: And so every—basically, every dollar that is being spent on this Ukraine assistance, the U.S. is seeing returns to both the national security of Ukraine, the national security of the United States, and to essentially the pockets of defense contractors?
- A: That was certainly DOD's point of view.
- Q: So that seems like a pretty good investment from your perspective?
- A: I believe so.

After listening to the President's call on July 25, 2019, from the Situation Room, Ms. Williams felt it was "unusual and inappropriate" and that it "shed some light on possible other motivations behind a security assistance hold." (Page 130, 148-149, 150)

- Q: Okay. During the July 25 call, did you have any concerns about the conversation that you heard between President Trump and President Zelensky?
- A: I certainly noted that the mention of these specific investigations seemed unusual as compared to other discussions with foreign leaders.
- Q: And why were they unusual?
- A: I believed those references to be more political in nature and so that struck me as unusual.
- ...
- Q: And you stated that you took notes of the mentions of the political conditions in the July 25th call because you thought that they were improper, because they were more political than diplomatic. Is that right?
- A: I think that's how I would characterize those two references to specific investigations on that call, yes.
- Q: Some people would say that diplomacy itself is inherently political, and so everything diplomatic is, by definition, political also, but you had a strong

reaction to that. Can you spell out what you saw as improperly political about those mentions?

A: I believe I found the specific references to be—to be more specific to the President in nature, to his personal political agenda, as opposed to a broader—

Q: Do you mean related to a campaign?

A: Potentially, as opposed to a broader foreign policy objective of the United States.

...

Q: You had no personal feeling response to that, given how you've characterized it?

A: Again, I would say that it struck me as unusual and inappropriate.

Q: Ms. Williams, that's not the question. How did it make you feel?

A: I guess for me it shed some light on possible other motivations behind a security assistance hold.

Ms. Williams' handwritten notes reflect that President Zelensky mentioned "Burisma" on the July 25th call, and she does not know why "Burisma" does not appear in the summary document released by the White House. (Page 66-67, 129; appended testimony)

At her deposition, Ms. Williams was asked whether the Ukrainian company Burisma was mentioned by name during the call between President Trump and President Zelensky on July 25, 2019. She testified that it was. She was then asked who had mentioned it and whether she had taken notes. Ms. Williams testified that she had taken notes, and that she believed her notes reflected that President Trump had referenced Burisma. At the time of her testimony, that was Ms. Williams's recollection. Upon reviewing her contemporaneous notes following the deposition, Ms. Williams discovered that it was President Zelensky who mentioned Burisma by name during the call. However, the record of the call released by the White House does not explicitly name Burisma.

Q: Did you ever compare your notes to the transcripts?

A: More recently I went back to look when I had heard that there was other testimony through this process that—I believe Lieutenant Colonel Vindman had noticed a couple of small discrepancies. My notes did reflect that the word Burisma had come up in the call, that the President had mentioned Burisma. I hadn't noticed that when I first read the transcript.

...

Q: So I think I want to go back to the July 25 call, and I know you were asked questions about this from minority counsel but I had a few others. First, on the issue of Burisma, the company coming up, does the word "Burisma" actually appear in your notes that you reviewed recently?

A: Yes.

Q: So you wouldn't have written that down if it hadn't come up during the call. Is that right?

A: Correct.

The Vice President's staff included a transcript of the July 25, 2019, call in his briefing book the same day that it took place. (Page 69-70, 108)

- Q: Okay. When the transcript was made available to the VP's office, do you remember when that occurred?
- A: My colleagues—I can't remember the precise time, but before the end of the day that day my colleagues who help prepare the Vice President's briefing book received a hard copy of the transcript from the White House Situation Room to include in that book. I didn't personally see it, but I understood that they had received it because we wanted to make sure the Vice President got it.
- Q: On the 25th or 26th?
- A: It was on the 25th?
- Q: Okay. Was that the final version? Or you don't know?
- A: I don't know. I mean, it's the version that we provided to the Vice President.
- Q: Okay. So that went into his briefing book?
- A: That's right.
- ...
- Q: And I think you said that after the July 25 call between President Trump and President Zelensky you also included that call record in the Vice President's daily briefing book?
- A: Yes, in his daily briefing book that same day, on July 25.

In September 2019, Ms. Williams read a first-person cable from Ambassador Bill Taylor about the importance of U.S. security assistance to Ukraine and agreed with his assessment that the hold on the aid was "folly." (Page 125-127)

- Q: Okay. Are you familiar with a firsthand or first-person cable that Ambassador Taylor drafted and sent to Secretary Pompeo, and that we believe was further distributed possibly to the White House?
- A: I am. I've read the cable.
- Q: Were you on the distribution of the cable?
- A: I received it, I believe, from State Department colleagues, but not on the original distribution, since it was a limited cable that went straight to the Secretary's office.
- Q: Do you remember who sent it to you or how you got it?
- A: I don't recall, to be honest. It might have been from NSC colleagues.
- Q: Do you recall what the cable said?
- A: It was a cable outlining Ambassador Taylor's rationale on the importance of our U.S. security assistance to Ukraine, and why it was important for the security assistance to continue to flow.
- Q: Do you recall him saying that the hold was folly?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Do you recall anything else that he said, or any other recommendations that he made?
- A: It was a lengthy cable. I don't remember it verbatim, but I thought it was a very persuasive case.

...

Q: You've used the words "significant, persuasive." Why did you think Ambassador Taylor's memo was both significant and persuasive?

A: I thought he laid out a very strong case for the effectiveness of U.S. security assistance to Ukraine, as we've discussed before, not just because of the actual physical and substantial support that it provides, but also the symbolic value of it; and that at this particular critical moment in Ukrainian politics and security environment, that any signal of wavering U.S. support would send the wrong message to President Zelensky just as he was trying to implement his reform agenda.

Q: And you said you recall Ambassador Taylor writing that he thought the freeze was—the hold was folly. Did you agree with that assessment as well?

A: Yes.