



US Lobbyists Report Work for Zelensky, Contradicting Claim

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WASHINGTON — Washington-based lobbying firm Signal Group Consulting has filed documentation of services it provided to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Washington between April 3, 2019, and May 21, 2019, contradicting his claim that his campaign never employed foreign lobbyists.

According to documents presented to the Justice Department as part of mandatory annual Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) filings, Signal received a fee of \$60,000 for its services and \$9,371 in compensation for expenses, including a \$1,900 steak dinner, a guided White House tour and staff meetings with members of the National Security Council, State Department officials, members of Congress, and visits to think tanks and major national news outlets such as *The Washington Post*.

As initially reported by Radio Free Europe and other news outlets, a portion of the FARA documents made public in April appeared to show that Signal was hired on behalf of the candidate by Marcus Cohen, whose business address is listed as a room on the second floor of a Kyiv shopping center, "to elevate the profile of Volodymyr Zelensky Servant of the People."

At the time, Voice of America's Ukrainian Service followed up with a series of questions about the Signal contract as Zelensky's campaign had criticized his opponent, then-incumbent Petro Poroshenko, for engaging in exactly this type of international public relations work — a fairly normal and legal part of modern European politics.

"Due to another tide of disinformation, shared in the media on the eve of the runoff, we must officially state that our team did not engage the services of any lobbyists or agencies in the United States," Zelensky's campaign said in a prepared statement posted to its official Facebook page on April 17, some four days before the final election.

"We don't have a contract with any company called 'Signal Group,'" the post continued. "This position is what separates us from representatives of the 'old' political elite."

The contract was officially terminated on May 21, 2019, one day after Zelensky's inauguration.

According to the FARA documents, the Ukrainian delegation arrived in Washington on or before April 16, though it does not state how many people were in the delegation.

The documents verify reports on the meetings at the Cato Institute, State Department, CSIS, Carnegie Center, the office of Congressman Brandon Boyle, former Sen. Norm Coleman, and the National Security Council.

A guided White House excursion is reported on April 17, the same day Zelensky's campaign issued an official statement denying they'd engaged in foreign lobbying efforts.

Signal Group also contacted the *Post* and CNN, but there were no reports of interviews.

This weekend, Zelensky again denied having any personal contact with the Signal Group

"I've never used anybody. I don't need a lobby," he told a reporter who pressed him with questions in Kyiv. "You know this perfectly well how many people support me. I've never had a meeting with any lobbyist, any intermediary, and have never asked anybody about it."

Asked whether campaign operatives could have been acting on his behalf, he denied any knowledge of it.

"I don't know. I didn't do this," he said. "I do not need it. I never paid a penny for it, and this can't be."

An email sent to VOA on Aug. 3 from John Proctor, executive vice president of Signal Group, however, confirmed the business contract with Zelensky and his party.

"Signal Group's work for Mr. Zelensky and the Servant of the People party through Marcus Cohen concluded on May 21 and is detailed in our FARA filings with the US Department of Justice," Proctor wrote. "I would direct you to the details of those documents for your reporting. The firm does not have anything additional to add."

Upon entering the race for president as a political novice, Zelensky had been best known for his role in a TV series about a schoolteacher who vaults to his country's presidency on the wave of anti-corruption disgust.

"I'm not a politician," Zelensky, 41, told former president Poroshenko in their only debate before Sunday's runoff election. "I'm just an ordinary person who has come to break the system. I'm the result of your mistakes and promises."

"I promise I will never let any of you down," he said in his final statement to the audience.