



White House Watch: When Did Kelly Know About Rob Porter?

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Rob Porter, the now-former staff secretary at the White House, was given the benefit of the doubt when credible allegations he had physically abused his ex-wives emerged this week. That's how deputy press secretary Raj Shah put it in his briefing to the press Thursday, a day after Porter tendered his resignation. Asked if the White House staff's judgment was clouded when handling the allegations, Shah responded: "I think I'd point you to a number of statements that indicate that the White House was prepared to defend Rob Porter based on initial accusations that we heard about and his denial, and that was based on our experiences with Rob Porter."

Shah also made an admission, rare for this administration, that the White House could have responded to the allegations differently. "I think it's fair to say that we all could have done better over the last few hours, or last few days, in dealing with this situation," said Shah.

Left unanswered by Shah's briefing or by a Wednesday-night statement from chief of staff John Kelly that he was "shocked" by the new allegations, is when, exactly, he and other senior White House officials learned about the allegations against Porter. "He became fully aware about these allegations yesterday," Shah said of Kelly. Pressed on what "fully aware" meant, Shah noted Kelly had not yet seen the photographs of Porter's first wife with a black eye, which were published Wednesday. Before then, Kelly had defended Porter from the accusations and even asked his West Wing colleague to stay on.

The beginning of an answer probably lies in the issue of Porter's interim security clearance, issued to him and other White House employees at the beginning of the administration until the FBI's background check could be completed. Shah claimed Thursday the background check had been "ongoing" and dodged multiple questions about when Kelly became aware of the allegations that had been holding up Porter's clearance.

But two newspaper reports have more definitive answers. [*The New York Times*](#) reports the White House first learned about the red flag in Porter's background check in August. "Mr. Kelly has known about the allegations at least since last fall, according to officials who asked not to be

named,” reads the *Times*. And the Washington Post claims that White House counsel Don McGahn “knew one year ago” about the allegations.

“When McGahn informed Kelly this fall about the reason for the security clearance holdup, he agreed that Porter should remain and said he was surprised to learn that the 40-year-old had ex-wives,” reports the *Post*.

Quote of the Day— “Omarosa was fired three times on *The Apprentice*, and this was the fourth time we let her go.” —Raj Shah, White House deputy press secretary, on former White House staffer Omarosa Manigault-Newman, who criticized the White House and the president on the (television) reality show in which she currently stars

Friday is the first day of the Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang, South Korea, where Vice President Mike Pence arrived Thursday to lead the American delegation. Speaking to U.S. troops in Japan Thursday, Pence made it clear that he’s unimpressed by the apparent newfound closeness between South Korea’s government and Kim regime in North Korea.

“As we speak, an estimated 100,000 North Korean citizens labor in modern-day gulags,” Pence said. “Those who dare raise their voices in dissent are imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered; their children and grandchildren routinely punished for their family’s sins against the state.”

This year’s Olympics have occasioned a remarkable thaw between the two Korean states, which have remained technically at war since the 1950s. The regimes began tentative diplomatic talks in January, later announcing they would field a joint delegation to the PyeongChang games. President Trump initially took credit for the improved relations in a January 4 tweet.

Pence seems determined not to let North Korea’s rogue conduct be swept under the rug in a rush of optimism. His guest at the games, Fred Warmbier, is the father of American college student Otto Warmbier, who died last year after being detained and receiving brutal treatment in North Korea.

Trump Tweet of the Day

And Another One—Here’s a devastating report from Politico documenting years of sexual harassment allegations against Ed Crane, the founder and longtime president of the libertarian Cato Institute.

We’ve got two special guest speakers at this year’s Weekly Standard Summit at the Broadmoor Resort in Colorado Springs: *Special Report* host Bret Baier of Fox News and *Real Clear Politics* columnist A.B. Stoddard. Get a chance to hear from them and the others in our lineup of speakers (including your humble White House Watch author) from May 17-20.

Learn more and sign up for the Summit here.

Must-Read of the Day— “Jimmy Buffett Does Not Live the Jimmy Buffett Lifestyle”

2018 Watch—From the *Washington Examiner*: “Sebastian Gorka fully supports Danny Tarkanian (whose campaign paid Gorka \$5,000)”

Song of the Day— “Theme For an Imaginary Western” by Mountain