



Jared Kushner on Russia meeting: I didn't have 'time to read every' email

Kimberly Atkins

July 25, 2017

Jared Kushner denied Russian collusion yesterday in a closed-door session with congressional investigators, the first of a series of high-stakes interviews targeting President Trump's White House and campaign inner circles — including Donald Trump Jr.

“Let me be very clear: I did not collude with Russia nor do I know of anyone else in the campaign who did so,” Kushner said in brief remarks at the White House after being questioned on Capitol Hill for nearly three hours by the staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee. The president's son-in-law and senior adviser is set to answer more questions today in a second closed session before the House Intelligence Committee.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the president “was very proud of Jared” and reiterated his belief that the probe is “a witch hunt and hoax.”

Trump Jr. and a former Trump campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, are also due to appear privately before congressional investigators in an agreement worked out to avoid testifying publicly. Lying to the congressional investigators carries a penalty of up to 5 years in prison.

“This is kind of morphing into a combination of Iran Contra and Watergate,” said Patrick G. Eddington, a Cato Institute policy analyst and former CIA officer, citing the breadth of the probe and its proximity to the president.

A key topic of the interviews will be a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower Kushner, Manafort and Donald Trump Jr. attended with Russians offering damaging information about then-Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

In an 11-page opening statement to investigators, which Kushner released yesterday, he denied prior knowledge of the purpose of that meeting or its attendees, despite being forwarded an email from Donald Trump Jr. with the subject line “Russia — Clinton — private and confidential” and requesting that Kushner attend.

“I did not have the time to read every (email), especially long emails from unknown senders or email chains to which I was added at some later point in the exchange,” Kushner said.

But Kushner did detail four interactions with Russians during the campaign and transition, including what he called a brief meeting with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak at an April 2016 campaign foreign policy event at the Mayflower Hotel that Kushner organized.

But, Kushner maintained, “I had no ongoing relationship with the ambassador before the election, and had limited knowledge about him then.”

Kushner also denied seeking a “secret back channel” between Washington and Moscow before the inauguration, saying he only asked Kislyak about an “existing communications channel at his embassy” that could be used to discuss Syrian policy.

Those statements will now be weighed against not only the testimony of other witnesses questioned by Congress and special counsel Robert Mueller, but also against a broad body of intelligence information, including intercepts and documents, that has yet to be disclosed publicly. Inconsistencies with that evidence could prove legally and politically perilous.

“It’s what you don’t know at the end of the day that can really come back to hurt you,” Eddington said.