

William Barr Testimony Highlights: Government ‘Spying Did Occur’ on Trump Campaign

- Attorney General William P. Barr, appearing before Congress for a second straight day on Wednesday, said the government spied on the Trump campaign and said he would look into whether any rules were violated.
- Mr. Barr signaled he was open to sharing more information with lawmakers about the redacted Mueller report than is released to the public and that he “hoped” to make it public “next week.”
- Meanwhile, the Senate Judiciary Committee is considering the nomination of Jeffrey A. Rosen, President Trump’s nominee to succeed Rod J. Rosenstein, who appointed and oversaw the special counsel, as deputy attorney general.

Barr will review potential “spying” on the Trump campaign.

With the Russia investigation complete, Mr. Barr said he was preparing to review “both the genesis and the conduct of intelligence activities directed at the Trump campaign,” including possible improper “spying” by American intelligence agencies.

“I think spying on a political campaign is a big deal,” Mr. Barr said, adding that he believed “spying did occur.” Mr. Trump and his allies have accused the F.B.I. and other government officials of abusing their power and cooking up the Russia investigation to sabotage the president.

“I am not suggesting that those rules were violated, but I think it’s important to look at them,” Mr. Barr said. Later he said he wanted to ensure that there was no “improper surveillance” — not suggesting there had been, but that the possibility warranted review.

It was not immediately clear what Mr. Barr was referring to, and he did not

present evidence to back up his statement. The F.B.I. obtained a secret surveillance warrant on a former Trump campaign adviser, Carter Page, after he left the campaign, and reports have suggested it used at least one confidential informer to collect information on campaign associates.

Mr. Barr said that he will work with the F.B.I. director, Christopher A. Wray, to examine the origins of the bureau's counterintelligence investigation of the Trump campaign, and that he would soon set up a team for that effort. He noted that Congress and the Justice Department's inspector general have already completed investigations of that matter, and that after reviewing those investigations he would be able to see whether there were any "remaining questions to be addressed."

Barr gave up a few more details about Mueller's report.

Under intense questioning from Democratic senators, Mr. Barr further pulled back the curtain on the Justice Department's handling of the special counsel investigation, though only by a few inches.

Mr. Barr shed some additional light on Mr. Mueller's decision not to reach a prosecutorial decision about whether Mr. Trump criminally obstructed the investigation and his own decision to conclude in his letter to Congress delivering the investigation's conclusions last month that the evidence did not meet that bar.

Mr. Barr said he had spoken with Mr. Mueller about why he did not reach a decision on obstruction of justice, but declined to offer details of their conversations. The attorney general said that Mr. Mueller did not explicitly ask that Congress be allowed to judge the evidence and decide for itself, nor did he say that the attorney general should.

"But that is generally how the Department of Justice works," Mr. Barr said, saying that the department's job is to make prosecutorial decisions — and he had.

"I am looking forward to explaining my decision that I briefly outlined in the March 24 letter, but I don't think I can do it until the report is out," he said.

The redacted Mueller report may be released “next week,” Barr says.

On the timing of the redacted report’s release, Mr. Barr said Wednesday that he “hoped” to make it public “next week.” The answer differed slightly from what he told House lawmakers on Tuesday, that he intended to put out the report “within a week.”

He said Justice Department lawyers and members of Mr. Mueller’s team, who are reviewing the report for sensitive information to black out before release, would not remove information that would harm the “reputational interests” of Mr. Trump. Mr. Barr also said that he had not overruled Mr. Mueller’s team on any proposed redactions from the Mueller report, and had not discussed with the White House what he was blacking out.

Barr is willing to work with Congress on redacted information.

Democrats in the House have slammed Mr. Barr for what they view as his refusal to share the investigation’s underlying evidence and material he may redact from the report. But Mr. Barr told senators on Wednesday he would be willing to re-evaluate that decision to try to accommodate lawmakers’ concerns.

“I intend to take up with the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, the chairmen and ranking members of each, what other areas they feel they have a need to have access to the information and see if I can work to accommodate that,” he said.

Democratic lawmakers argue that they need such material so they can fully understand the implications of Mr. Mueller’s findings and judge whether or not Mr. Barr had fairly represented what was found. In the House, they have already approved a subpoena to issue to try to compel the release of this kind of information.

Barr again refused to say if he had briefed the White House.

Mr. Barr again declined to say whether he had briefed the White House on the fuller Mueller report, even though Justice Department officials had previously said it had not been shown to the White House.

His refusal to say one way or the other raised the possibility that since then, the Justice Department may have briefed Mr. Trump or his inner circle about its contents.

“I’m landing the plane right now,” Mr. Barr said under Democratic questioning. “I have been willing to discuss my letter and the process going forward. The report is going to be out next week and I’m not just going into the details of the process.”

Trump says there is nothing to clear up: “I won.”

Interest in the report remains intense among congressional lawmakers. President Trump, not so much.

Speaking to reporters as he left the White House on Wednesday, the president slammed the investigation as an illegal “attempted coup.” But he said he had “won” and could care less about the report itself.

“I have not seen the Mueller report,” Mr. Trump told reporters. “I have not read the Mueller report. I won. No collusion, no obstruction. I won. Everybody knows I won.”

He continued: “As far as I’m concerned I don’t care about the Mueller report. I’ve been totally exonerated.”

The report, which runs nearly 400 pages, is likely to be less black and white. Mr. Barr has said Mr. Mueller did not find the Trump campaign conspired with Russia to undermine the 2016 election, but he has said that the special counsel’s team did not reach a prosecutorial decision about whether Mr. Trump criminally

obstructed the investigation. Mr. Barr, assessing the evidence for himself, concluded the evidence did not meet that bar.

Rosen vows to keep politics from improperly influencing his decisions

Meanwhile, at the Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing for Mr. Rosen, Senator Amy Klobuchar, Democrat of Minnesota, pressed the nominee to commit to allowing all pending criminal matters related to the special counsel's investigation to proceed without improper political interference.

"If I am confirmed, I would expect in all prosecutorial matters to proceed on the facts and the law and not any improper political influences," Mr. Rosen replied.

Ms. Klobuchar did not name which matters she had in mind, though several cases are still working their way through the court system. But Mr. Mueller's office obtained the indictment of Roger J. Stone Jr., a longtime informal adviser to President Trump, and is handing that matter off to regular prosecutors to bring to trial. The Mueller team also investigated other matters, like the finances of the Trump inauguration committee, which continue to be investigated elsewhere.

Rosen defends his role in the Trump administration's fuel efficiency proposal

Under questioning by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, Mr. Rosen defended his role in crafting a Trump administration proposal on tailpipe pollution rules. Ms. Feinstein referred to a New York Times article that portrayed him as pushing to let cars emit more greenhouse gases. Mr. Rosen said the article had several errors, although he did not identify them.

He also said the issue was how to implement a law that required annual increases in fuel economy standards through 2020, and then set criteria for decisions about whether to require any further escalations in the years after that. The Trump administration, he said, was merely proposing a "time out" after 2020.

In fact, the current regulations, put forth by the Obama administration, already require automakers to keep improving the fuel economy of passenger vehicles

through 2025. The Trump administration's preferred proposal would therefore allow more greenhouse gas pollution than current rules.

Mr. Rosen also portrayed himself as playing a "managerial" role in overseeing the crafting of the rule, such as by ensuring deadlines were met. But 11 people interviewed by The New York Times at the time of the negotiation said that Mr. Rosen pushed forcefully for that outcome.

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