

WHO WOULD HAVE TOLD TRUMP TO GO BACK TO DEMAND A PATRONAGE RELATIONSHIP WITH COMEY?

Jim Comey made a comment in his testimony the other day I've not seen others mention. Mark Warner asked him to explain this comment on patronage from his written testimony.

The President began by asking me whether I wanted to stay on as FBI Director, which I found strange because he had already told me twice in earlier conversations that he hoped I would stay, and I had assured him that I intended to. He said that lots of people wanted my job and, given the abuse I had taken during the previous year, he would understand if I wanted to walk away.

My instincts told me that the one-on-one setting, and the pretense that this was our first discussion about my position, meant the dinner was, at least in part, an effort to have me ask for my job and create some sort of patronage relationship. That concerned me greatly, given the FBI's traditionally independent status in the executive branch.

I replied that I loved my work and intended to stay and serve out my ten-year term as Director. And then, because the set-up made me uneasy, I added that I was not "reliable" in the way politicians use that word, but he could always count on me to tell him the truth. I added that I was not on anybody's side politically and could not

be counted on in the traditional political sense, a stance I said was in his best interest as the President. A few moments later, the President said, "I need loyalty, I expect loyalty."

When Warner asked Comey to explain this comment at Thursday's hearing, Comey explained he thought that Trump was belatedly trying to get something from Comey in exchange for letting him stay on his job.

WARNER: Let me move to the January 27th dinner, where you said "The president began by asking me whether I wanted to stay on as FBI director."

He also indicated that "lots of people" again your words, "Wanted the job." You go on to say the dinner itself was "Seemingly an effort to" to quote have you ask him for your job and create some "patronage" relationship. The president seems from my reading of your memo to be holding your job or your possibility of continuing your job over your head in a fairly direct way. What was your impression, and what did you mean by this notion of a patronage relationship?

COMEY: Well, my impression, and again it's my impression, I could always be wrong but my common sense told me what was going on is, **either he had concluded or someone had told him that you didn't, you've already asked Comey to stay, and you didn't get anything for it.** And that the dinner was an effort to build a relationship, in fact, he asked specifically, of loyalty in the context of asking me to stay. As I said, what was odd about that is we'd already talked twice about it by that point and he said I very much hope you'll stay. In fact, I just remembered sitting a third, when you've seen the. IC tour of me walking across the blue room, and what

the president whispered in my ear was “I really look forward to working with you.” So after those encounters –

WARNER: That was a few days before your firing.

COMEY: On the Sunday after the inauguration. The next Friday I have dinner and the president begins by wanting to talk about my job and so I’m sitting there thinking wait a minute three times we’ve already, you’ve already asked me to stay or talked about me staying. My common sense, again I could be wrong but my common sense told me what’s going on here is, he’s looking to get something in exchange for granting my request to stay in the job.
[my emphasis]

Comey explained that – after already having been assured three times that he would remain in his position – Trump raised the issue anew in a private dinner. Comey didn’t say this, but this happened the day after Sally Yates first told White House Counsel Don McGahn that Mike Flynn had misrepresented his comments to Sergey Kislyak. And in that dinner, Trump implied that if Comey wanted to stay in the job he’d been offered three times already, he had to give Trump loyalty.

What I’m especially interested in is what Comey believed elicited this: Comey figured that “either [Trump] had concluded or someone [else] had told [Trump] that you didn’t, you’ve already asked Comey to stay, and you didn’t get anything for it” which is what led Trump to invite Trump for dinner.

Given the timing, it would be interesting all by itself if Trump had decided on his own to get some kind of commitment from Comey in order to keep his job, because it would make it far more likely that McGahn told Trump about Yates’ concerns.

But Comey testified that he thought that perhaps someone else went to Trump and suggested he should go back to Comey and try to demand loyalty to keep his job.

Who?

Does Comey think Mike Flynn did this? Don McGahn (which would be downright shocking)? Or did he think that one of the two people who lingered at the next weird meeting alone with Trump – Attorney General Sessions or Son-in-Law-in-Chief Jared Kushner – made the suggestion?

He didn't say. But I find the suggestion that Comey believes someone may have – at the same time as DOJ was telling the White House that Mike Flynn was in trouble – encouraged Trump to go make demands from Comey.