

MUELLER HOMING IN ON TRUMP'S INAUGURATION GRAFT

There are twin scoops today that suggest a new direction in the Mueller investigation. The AP broke the report that Mueller's team interviewed Tom Barrack – who on top of being an actual billionaire (unlike Trump), one of his closest friends, and the guy who recommended he hire Paul Manafort, was his Inauguration Committee Chair – in December.

One of the people who spoke to AP said the questioning focused entirely on two officials from Trump's campaign who have been indicted by Mueller: Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, and Manafort's onetime deputy, Rick Gates. Gates agreed to plead guilty to federal conspiracy and false-statement charges in February and began cooperating with investigators.

A second person with knowledge of the Barrack interview said the questioning was broader, including financial matters about the campaign, the transition and Trump's inauguration in January 2017.

Rick Gates, who served as Deputy Chair of the inauguration, flipped in late February.

In early April, the press reported that multiple oligarchs were being questioned about inauguration donations by Mueller.

Investigators are asking whether wealthy Russians illegally funneled cash donations directly or indirectly into Donald Trump's presidential campaign and inauguration.

Yesterday, NYT confirmed that the oligarch stopped in NY was Viktor Vekselberg. In addition

to the inauguration, Vekselberg attended the RT dinner attended by Mike Flynn, and ran a corrupt Cypriot bank with Wilbur Ross.

Federal agents working with Mr. Mueller stopped Mr. Vekselberg, a billionaire businessman, at a New York-area airport this year, searched his electronic devices and questioned him, according to people familiar with the matter. They confronted him after he stepped off a private plane about two months ago, according to one of the people.

[snip]

Vekselberg also attended a December 2015 dinner in Russia where Michael T. Flynn, Mr. Trump's first national security adviser, was also among the guests and sat beside Mr. Putin. The dinner was hosted by RT, the English-language television news network financed by the Kremlin.

[snip]

Another potential area of interest for Mr. Mueller is Mr. Vekselberg's business in Cyprus, the Mediterranean nation considered a magnet for Russian money. Mr. Vekselberg has controlled a company that has been the largest single shareholder in the Bank of Cyprus. Around the same time that Mr. Vekselberg was investing in the bank, Mr. Trump's future commerce secretary, Wilbur L. Ross, was its vice chairman.

Remember, Barrack raised double money for the inauguration than a normal take. And as of earlier this year, Trump still hadn't donated the money, as promised.

In late September, the committee announced that it had donated \$3 million to multiple groups involved in hurricane relief efforts in the Gulf

Coast, Florida and the Caribbean. An undetermined amount of funds were allocated to redecorating the White House and Vice President Mike Pence's home in Washington, rather than charitable efforts.

Barrack, chairman of the inaugural committee, said details about the committee's donations to charity would be released in November. Yet the deadline passed without further financial information being disclosed. A spokesman for Barrack declined to comment on the report's delay or allegations that the committee mismanaged funds under his leadership.

So that money went ... somewhere.

Update: My use of "honing" instead of "homing" has set off quite the debate. I've changed it to move discussion back to the topic at hand. Thanks to all who weighed in.