

ACCORDING TO HOPE HICKS'S TESTIMONY, TRUMP SHOULD APPLAUD PAUL MANAFORT'S CONVICTION

Every time I review what how dodgy (in the case of Carter Page and George Papadopoulos) or absolute sleazebags (Mike Flynn and Paul Manafort) the first subjects of the Russian investigation are, I grow more and more convinced that Trump *must* have something to hide, otherwise he'd spend his time beating up these guys for tainting his beautiful campaign, to say nothing of trying to monetize their association with him.

That's all the more true given that the Trump campaign fired three of the men for the same Russian ties they got investigated for and, according to a number of Trump's associates, had grown impatient with Flynn even before his calls to Sergey Kislyak. That said, when asked about it in her House Judiciary Committee testimony, Hope Hicks seemed like she was trying to minimize the damage of her testimony that Trump had already soured on Flynn when the former General started lying about his discussions with Sergey Kislyak.

Which is why I find this exchange between Norm Eisen and Hicks so fascinating (note: Eisen is one of the HJC staffers who has read some of the underlying materials in the Mueller investigation, and he asked a number of questions that disclosed those underlying materials, as he does here).

Q Okay. Did you hear candidate Trump tell Mr. Gates, Rick Gates, to keep an eye on Manafort at any point during the campaign?

A Yes.

Q Tell me about that incident.

A It was sometime after the Republican Convention. I think Mr. Trump was displeased with the press reports regarding the platform change, the confusion around the communications of that, Paul sort of stumbling in some interviews and then trying to clarify later and it just being messy. So he was frustrated with that. I don't think that Mr. Trump understood the longstanding relationship between Rick and Paul. I think he, you know, obviously knew that Rick was Paul's deputy but not maybe to the extent of – you know, didn't understand the extent of their relationship. And he said something to the effect of – you know, I'm very much paraphrasing here, so I want to be very careful – but sort of questioned Paul's past work with other foreign governments, foreign campaigns, and said that, you know, none of that would be appropriate to be ongoing during his service with the Trump campaign and that Rick needed to keep an eye on that and make sure Mr. Trump was aware if anything led him to believe that was ongoing.

Q What do you mean by the "platform change"?

A Whatever was reported in the press. To be honest, I had no knowledge of it during the actual convention.

Q Is it a reference to the change in the RNC platform concerning arming Ukraine?

A Again, I'm not familiar with the details.

The first concerns about the platform were raised on July 18, 2016. The interview where

Manafort most famously stumbled was on July 27, 2016 (which happened to be just two days before Manafort agreed to meet with Konstantin Kilimnik about a Viktor Yanukovych plan to carve up Ukraine). According to Hope, Trump's response to those events was to ask Rick Gates to keep an eye on Manafort.

That would date the request to around the same time as Gates attended part of the August 2, 2016 meeting between Kilimnik and Manafort where the latter briefed his former employee on how the campaign intended to win Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania while talking about how to get more work with Ukrainian oligarchs and Oleg Deripaska. That is, not only was Manafort's past work with foreign governments continuing during his service on Trump's campaign – precisely what (according to Hicks) Trump said would be so problematic – but Manafort was using Trump's campaign to secure ongoing business with those foreigners.

If Trump's concern about Manafort's foreign ties back in 2016 were serious – and not just a reaction against bad press – then he should be furious upon the revelation that not only were Manafort's ties to Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs ongoing during the campaign, not only was he using Trump's campaign as a way to secure his next big gig, but that Gates knew all that.

Instead, he was and probably still is considering pardoning Paul Manafort.

Either Hicks' claims about this exchange are spin – for example, claiming that Trump was worried about the conflict generally rather than just the bad press about it – or something happened after the fact that has brought Trump to forgive Manafort for doing precisely what he was so worried he would do, mix loyalties during the election.

It be really nice if Trump were asked why he's so angry that Mueller discovered that his campaign manager was engaged in just the kind of disloyalty he told Hicks, in real time, he was

worried about. Better still, it'd be nice if he were asked why, rather than cheering Manafort's conviction for these divided loyalties, Trump is instead considering pardoning him.

As I disclosed last July, I provided information to the FBI on issues related to the Mueller investigation, so I'm going to include disclosure statements on Mueller investigation posts from here on out. I will include the disclosure whether or not the stuff I shared with the FBI pertains to the subject of the post.