

MANAFORT'S EFFORTS TO INSINUATE HIMSELF INTO TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN EARLIER THAN PREVIOUSLY KNOWN

The Mueller Report describes Trump's decision to hire Paul Manafort this way.

Manafort served on the Trump Campaign from late March to August 19, 2016. On March 29, 2016, the Campaign announced that Manafort would serve as the Campaign's "Convention Manager."⁸⁷¹ On May 19, 2016, Manafort was promoted to campaign chairman and chief strategist, and Gates, who had been assisting Manafort on the Campaign, was appointed deputy campaign chairman.⁸⁷² Thomas Barrack and Roger Stone both recommended Manafort to candidate Trump.⁸⁷³

In early 2016, at Manafort's request, Barrack suggested to Trump that Manafort join the Campaign to manage the Republican Convention.⁸⁷⁴ Stone had worked with Manafort from approximately 1980 until the mid-1990s through various consulting and lobbying firms. Manafort met Trump in 1982 when Trump hired the Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly lobbying firm.⁸⁷⁵ Over the years, Manafort saw Trump at political and social events in New York City and at Stone's wedding, and Trump requested VIP status at the 1988 and 1996 Republican conventions worked by Manafort.⁸⁷⁶

According to Gates, in March 2016, Manafort traveled to Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida to meet with Trump. Trump hired him at that time.⁸⁷⁷

Manafort agreed to work on the Campaign without pay. Manafort had no meaningful income at this point in time, but resuscitating his domestic political campaign career could be financially beneficial in the future. Gates reported that Manafort intended, if Trump won the Presidency, to remain outside the Administration and monetize his relationship with the Administration.

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Gates' description for some of this (two of the cited Gates 302s and all of the Manafort ones have not been released yet) is fairly anodyne:

Thomas Barrack and Roger Stone acted as liaisons between Manafort and the Trump Campaign prior to Manafort's hiring. Trump had just lost the primary in Wisconsin and then won the primary in Louisiana, but the delegates refused to support him. Trump did not understand the mechanics of delegates and the way the system worked. Barrack and Stone had been lobbying for Trump to hire Manafort for some time and it wasn't until after the Wisconsin and Louisiana primaries that Trump agreed. Barrack was the person who set up Manafort's first meeting with Trump, Hicks and Lewandowski in Mar a Lago.

The bolded footnotes in the Mueller passage above derive, at least in part, from Tom Barrack's 302, which was released yesterday.

That 302 describes the background in more interesting fashion:

In January 2016, knowing of BARRACK's close association with then U.S. Presidential candidate TRUMP, MANAFORT asked BARRACK to intervene on his behalf to become the convention manager for the TRUMP Presidential Campaign. BARRACK

initially thought this was MANAFORT being MANAFORT. In other words, BARRACK described MANAFORT as an opportunist. MANAFORT was a good political strategist and had good ideas. But MANAFORT's relationship with [redacted] would make it difficult for BARRACK to intervene on his behalf. BARRACK stated MANAFORT's biggest impediment to joining the campaign was [redacted] who BARRACK described as someone with brilliance and bizarreness all wrapped up into one. Nonetheless, BARRACK met MANAFORT for coffee in Los Angeles, California to discuss the concept. MANAFORT told him TRUMP needed help and MANAFORT was the person who could help TRUMP. At this coffee meeting, MANAFORT also asked BARRACK whether he could do him a favor and give [redacted] a job interview with BARRACK's company.

BARRACK eventually approached TRUMP with the idea of MANAFORT helping the Presidential campaign but TRUMP dismissed the idea because of MANAFORT's connection to [redacted]

MANAFORT followed up their coffee meeting with a briefing paper about why the Republican Convention and its delegates were so important to the TRUMP campaign. In February or the beginning of March 2016, BARRACK again approached TRUMP about MANAFORT's involvement with the Convention, which TRUMP eventually agreed. MANAFORT stated he did not need to be paid by the campaign for his work on the convention, which TRUMP liked because he was paying for the campaign out of his own pocket.

[snip]

BARRACK stated the TRUMP campaign did not conduct any due diligence into MANAFORT's background before bringing him on to be the Convention Manager.

BARRACK described the campaign at the time as amateur, which is why bringing on an experienced political professional like MANAFORT was important. BARRACK also stated STONE, who had a continuing and intermittent relationship with TRUMP, weight in on supporting MANAFORT as the Convention Manager.

Those redactions in bold appear to be 5-characters long, so could well be Stone. The convention in 302s is to introduce someone's full name then include it in parentheses, but Stone would have been introduced pages earlier when Barrack described meeting Manafort's business partners from when Stone was a named partner. As noted, Stone shows up a paragraph later in the 302 in the same kind of context.

Whoever it is, the exemptions in that paragraph include b7A, ongoing investigation.

Whoever the redacted name, that Manafort was affirmatively asking for the Convention Manager job as soon as January is of particular interest. That's when DOJ opened the money laundering investigation into Manafort, after all. That was after the time when Felix Sater was pitching the Trump Tower deal.

And significantly, it raised the stakes on Trump's failure to manage his delegates before Manafort came in, something that Manafort buddy Roger Stone was closely involved with in his initial Stop the Steal effort. It also makes Manafort's second offer – to work for free – appear even more desperate (though he was financially desperate at the time).

Update: Added the follow-on language referencing Stone.