

“PROJECT RASPUTIN:” THE MICHAEL CAPUTO INTERVIEW

Yesterday, the government released another tranche of 302s in response to the BuzzFeed/CNN FOIA. There are actually a slew of interesting interviews.

One of those is Michael Caputo’s. Remember, in addition to having a background in and ongoing ties with Russia (which may have unfairly led to more scrutiny of him than others in the early days of the congressional investigations), he’s very close to Roger Stone. Shortly after Stone was indicted, the government put together a sealed list of witnesses with whom Stone could not have contact, and Caputo learned he was on it. After Stone’s guilty verdict, Caputo wrote Judge Amy Berman Jackson to request that she lift the gag so they could spend time over Christmas together.

Mr. Stone and I have been close friends since 1986. We work together, we dine together, our families share holidays together. I still do not fully understand why this order was entered – I was never a witness in his case and I had never testified before the grand jury – but I respected your order. Even as I attended his recent trial, we did not communicate. Mr. Stone has been especially obedient in this matter and I do not wish to disrupt his commitment to staying within the letter and spirit of your order.

But it’s Christmas, Judge, and our family wants to spend time with his. I also want his wife and children to know they can count on us to assist them through this difficult time, and that we’ll always be there to help them. I want them to know this now.

ABJ never responded to Caputo, and given that yesterday she invited prosecutors to complain about Stone's violations of her gag in the weekend after his guilty verdict, I suspect she's less convinced than Caputo is that Stone abided by her gag order.

MINUTE ORDER as to ROGER J. STONE, JR.
The parties are directed to include in their sentencing memoranda any arguments they wish to make concerning the defendant's compliance with the Court's media communications orders 36 149 and conditions of release as modified on February 21, 2019 and July 16, 2019, including, in particular, his compliance during the trial, and on or about November 13-15, 2019. SO ORDERED.

Caputo's interview is all the more interesting given that he gave among the most detailed descriptions of his testimony of any witness the day he testified back in 2018.

Caputo described that the Mueller investigators knew more about the Trump campaign than anyone who ever worked there.

After being interviewed by special counsel investigators on Wednesday, former aide to Donald Trump's presidential campaign Michael Caputo told CNN that Robert Mueller's team is "focused on Russia collusion."

"It's clear they are still really focused on Russia collusion," Caputo said, adding, "They know more about the Trump campaign than anyone who ever worked there."

[snip]

"The Senate and the House are net fishing," Caputo said. "The special counsel is spearfishing. They know what they are aiming at and are deadly accurate."

In other words, hours after Caputo finished testifying, he went to CNN to alert everyone, including (presumably) Stone that Mueller knew of things they were otherwise not telling.

The 302 describes that Caputo started the interview by noting that he had prepared a binder of notes and documents for the Senate Intelligence Committee interview he had the day before. Particularly given Caputo's response after his testimony, that's significant because multiple SSCI witnesses put together carefully massaged stories to tell less damning stories. Caputo obviously missed some things.

From the 302, it appears Caputo was asked (of Mueller's prosecutors, just Aaron Zelinsky attended this interview) a general question from the start: what his official and unofficial role in the 2016 election was. He was hired by longtime Roger Stone friend Paul Manafort.

After Donald J. Trump (Trump) won the primary, Caputo was invited to join the Trump Campaign by Paul Manafort. A meeting was held at Trump Tower on 04/25/2016 to discuss the opportunity. After the meeting, Caputo served as a senior advisor to the Trump Campaign in charge of communications for the candidate in New York until his resignation on 06/20/2016.

Note that Manafort was not yet campaign manager when Caputo was hired, and his Convention Manager job at the time had little to do with the daily talking points that it sounds like Caputo spent his time doing. So his hiring is fairly curious. There are other 302s where references to what is probably Caputo – and his June resignation – are redacted.

After Caputo resigned, he worked for Tom Barrack, fundraising. It's clear he emphasized he only raised money from *American* donors. Barrack's 302 was also released yesterday; we know the government still has questions about

whether that American donor claim is true.

Relatively early on, there is a 5-paragraph redacted discussion preceded by Caputo's comment that,

Regarding the pursuit of Hillary Clinton's missing 33,000 emails, Caputo thought it implausible to think that wasn't happening.

The passage ends with Caputo saying he wasn't involved in such activities and denying that he heard any discussion of WikiLeaks or Julian Assange.

Caputo said there was no coordination on his part on those types of activities. Additionally, Caputo did not recall hacking and/or Assange being a topic of conversation at the 2016 Republican National Convention. Caputo initially said Stone never mentioned WikiLeaks or Julian Assange, however, Caputo later modified this statement as documented below.

That was his second denial that he had made about WikiLeaks thus far into his interview. That comment is followed by four redacted paragraphs. There's also a later 12-paragraph section that is entirely redacted, which immediately precedes questions about DC Leaks. Both those of those passages, plus the 5-paragraph redaction noted above, are redacted under B6, B7C, and B7A exemptions. The first two exemptions are for privacy, and are very common. But the B7A exemption reflects an ongoing investigation. This formula is particularly interesting given that up until now, everything Stone related has been redacted under B7ABC exemptions tied to ABJ's gag.

In other words, just days before Stone and prosecutors will submit their sentencing memoranda, DOJ is still redacting things relating to Stone because of an ongoing

investigation.

The balance of the 302 discusses Sergei Millian and Caputo's ties to Russia and includes a redacted list of the people he told he had an interview with Mueller (also protected under b7A).

Finally, the interview includes Caputo's explanation for the Henry Greenberg story, which WaPo first reported this way, based in part on Stone's version of events

One day in late May 2016, Roger Stone – the political dark sorcerer and longtime confidant of Donald Trump – slipped into his Jaguar and headed out to meet a man with a “Make America Great Again” hat and a viscous Russian accent.

The man, who called himself Henry Greenberg, offered damaging information about Hillary Clinton, Trump's presumptive Democratic opponent in the upcoming presidential election, according to Stone, who spoke about the previously unreported incident in interviews with The Washington Post. Greenberg, who did not reveal the information he claimed to possess, wanted Trump to pay \$2 million for the political dirt, Stone said.

“You don't understand Donald Trump,” Stone recalled saying before rejecting the offer at a restaurant in the Russian-expat magnet of Sunny Isles, Fla. “He doesn't pay for anything.”

Later, Stone got a text message from Michael Caputo, a Trump campaign communications official who'd arranged the meeting after Greenberg had approached Caputo's Russian-immigrant business partner.

“How crazy is the Russian?” Caputo wrote, according to a text message reviewed by The Post. Noting that

Greenberg wanted “big” money, Stone replied, “waste of time.”

Two years later, the brief sit-down in Florida has resurfaced as part of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III’s sprawling investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign, according to Caputo. Caputo said he was asked about the meeting by prosecutors during a sometimes-heated questioning session last month.

Stone and Caputo, who did not previously disclose the meeting to congressional investigators, now say they believe they were the targets of a setup by U.S. law enforcement officials hostile to Trump.

As noted, the story deserves particular attention given that both Stone and Caputo failed to disclose this to the Intelligence Committees (though both sent revisions admitting to it after Caputo’s testimony, which distinguishes it from Stone’s lies about having a back channel to WikiLeaks).

When Zelinsky originally asked Caputo, generally, about any “connection to Russians and/or Russian nationals during the campaign” – the same question that had been asked by the Intelligence Committees – he claimed “this event occurred after his involvement with the campaign,” the same kind of story that George Papadopoulos told to separate a possible Russian dangle, temporally, from involvement in the campaign. But then he admitted it happened in May, before he resigned.

It’s clear Caputo offered a bunch of stories for why he believed this guy was Russian, which seems like an effort to minimize what he had learned before the event:

- He assumed he was a Russian US citizen of Russian descent (meaning, not an

immigrant)

- He had an accent
- His close friend [redacted] had made this assertion

Caputo revealed that he met Greenberg again on January 5, 2017 at a cancer research fundraiser he ran and claims Greenberg told him at that time he was a US citizen.

Caputo also dodged when asked why he referred this information to Stone.

Caputo didn't recall why he sent Greenberg to Stone, but thought it was probably because [redacted] and was involved in opposition research for years. Caputo typically didn't like relaying this type of opposition research material, and was not likely to give it to anyone at Trump Tower.

In other words, after unsuccessfully attempting to distance the event from the campaign temporally, he tried to do so ethically, suggesting he would never share this with the *actual* campaign, just with his rat-fucker buddy.

Perhaps the most interesting line in his description of Henry Greenberg, however, distinguished that Russian tie he tried to hide from something called "Project Rasputin."

"Project Rasputin" was mutually exclusive from anything having to do with Greenberg.

That reference to a heretofore unidentified project immediately precedes yet another paragraph redacted because of an ongoing investigation. And there's one more ongoing investigation paragraph before that passage ends with Caputo's explanation about how Stone might be easily duped by Russians.

Caputo advised he lived in Russia for approximately seven years, thereby having more experience with Russian than Stone.

Michael Caputo doesn't understand why ABJ still won't let him talk to Stone. The redactions in his 302 appear to provide some hint.