

BILL BARR NEEDS TO SOFTEN ROGER STONE'S SENTENCE TO PREVENT HIM FROM TALKING

As noted, after DOJ recommended what Roger Stone's own memo makes clear is a guidelines sentence yesterday, top DOJ officials almost certainly named Bill Barr have objected and announced they're going to lower the recommendation.

I believe the brazenness of this fight may be a reflection of the damaging information Roger Stone may have about Trump's own conduct.

The trial itself provided ample evidence of what Mark Meadows considers "collusion" involving Donald Trump personally. It showed the campaign – and probably Trump personally – were working through Stone to optimize the WikiLeaks releases from the very day they came out on June 14, 2016. It showed that Stone was informing Trump personally about his efforts to optimize the releases. After some arm-twisting to adhere to his grand jury testimony, Steve Bannon testified he knew of all this, contrary to some of what he had said in earlier testimony that Trump would learn about. Erik Prince was in the loop. Gates testified that Stone was strategizing with Jared Kushner on all this. And it appears that Paul Manafort was in the loop, too.

But all that really damning evidence came out in a trial that only had to prove *that* Stone had lied to cover up the actions he took to optimize the release of the WikiLeaks emails. The trial did not need to explain what Stone's actual back channel was, what he had to do to obtain it, and how involved Trump was in that process. And the trial did not explain it.

Indeed, there's evidence I'll lay out at more length in a follow-up that the government chose not to lay out all it knew. That is, it appears

the government came to trial prepared to present evidence about the underlying “collusion,” but ultimately decided to hold it back for now.

At multiple times during the trial, however, the prosecution pointed to suspiciously timed phone calls, right before or after Stone discussed WikiLeaks with Gates, Manafort, or Jerome Corsi. Only Stone or Trump can tell us what happened between the two men, what Trump’s actual role in maximizing the degree to which his campaign benefitted from Russia’s theft of his opponent’s email.

Immediately after the trial, Stone made an intense effort to get Trump to pardon him, with his wife Nydia appearing on Tucker Carlson’s show to ask directly and a man with a vuvuzela inside the White House calling for a pardon gates.

Since that time, Stone was silent, until the time that the Probation Office provided the sentencing range for the crimes that was built in to the way that Mueller charged this just over a year ago. That is, by charging Stone with witness tampering, Mueller built in the possibility that Stone would be facing the steep sentence recommended yesterday. And that steep sentence may have been envisioned not as the sum of what Stone’s actual actions entailed – certainly every single warrant save the last four showed probable cause that Stone had done far more – but rather as leverage to get Stone to tell what he knows about Trump’s involvement in all this.

Bill Barr was brought in as AG to bury abundant evidence that Trump was personally involved in efforts to maximize the Russian operation, to deny all the ways that Trump did cheat to win. From his initial misleading claims in the wake of the report’s release, he was always suppressing the centrality of Roger Stone in all this.

So it’s fairly safe to conclude that DOJ’s reversal today is not just an effort to prevent

a rich white man, Roger Stone, from facing the full consequences of his actions, but to prevent voters from learning what another rich white man did to cheat to get elected.

Yes, ultimately Trump will commute what is left of Roger Stone's sentence, probably on November 4, just like he fired Jeff Sessions the day after the 2018 election. But I suspect that Roger Stone, rightly, isn't going to leave anything to chance. And so neither can Bill Barr.

Update: Aaron Zelinsky just quit his position as Special Assistant USA, providing notice to ABJ he's withdrawing from the case immediately. This likely gives her the opportunity to hear from him, but also frees him up to testify before HJC. And these several steps – the harsh sentence in witness tampering and the possibility that Zelinsky would quit, creating the opportunity for transparency about the case in one or another place, probably has been built in from Barr's first efforts to shut down this investigation.

Update: Now all four prosecutors are off the Stone team, with Acting DC Criminal Division Chief John Crabb Jr (who replaced the existing CD Chief yesterday) signing a memo that makes a flaccid case that Stone's guidelines were totally out of whack. Of the four, it appears that Jonathan Kravis left DOJ entirely.