

**Opening Statement of Chairman Elijah E. Cummings
Hearing with Michael Cohen
February 26, 2019**

Good morning.

Today, the Committee will hear testimony from Michael Cohen, President Donald Trump's longtime personal attorney and one of his closest and most trusted advisors over the last decade.

On August 21, Mr. Cohen appeared in federal court and admitted to arranging secret payoffs of hundreds of thousands of dollars on the eve of the election to silence women alleging affairs with Donald Trump.

Mr. Cohen admitted to violating campaign finance laws and other laws.

He admitted to committing these felonies quote, **“in coordination with, and at the direction of”** President Trump.

And he admitted to lying about his actions to protect the President.

Some will certainly ask, if Mr. Cohen was lying then, why should we believe him now?

That is a legitimate question.

Here is how I view our role.

Every one of us in this room has a duty to serve as an independent check on the Executive Branch.

We are searching for the truth.

The President has made many statements of his own, and now the American people have a right to hear the other side.

They can watch Mr. Cohen's testimony and make their own judgment.

We received a copy of Mr. Cohen's written statement late last night.

It includes not only personal eyewitness accounts of meetings with Donald Trump as President inside the Oval Office, but it also includes documents and other corroborating evidence for some of Mr. Cohen's statements.

For example, Mr. Cohen has provided a copy of a check sent while the President was in office—with Donald Trump's signature on it—to reimburse Mr. Cohen for the hush-money payment to Stormy Daniels.

This new evidence raises a host of troubling legal and ethical concerns about the President's actions in the White House and before.

This check is dated August 1, 2017.

Six months later, in April of 2018, the President denied knowing anything about it.

In April 2018, President Trump was flying on Air Force One when a reporter asked him, quote: **“Did you know about the \$130,000 payment to Stormy Daniels?”**

The President answered, quote: **“No.”**

A month after that, the President admitted making payments to Mr. Cohen, but claimed they were part of **“a monthly retainer”** for legal services.

This claim fell apart in August when federal prosecutors concluded, quote: **“In truth and in fact, there was no such retainer agreement.”**

Today we will also hear Mr. Cohen’s account of a meeting in 2016 in Donald Trump’s office during which Roger Stone said, over a speakerphone, that he had just spoken with Julian Assange, who said there would be a, quote **“massive dump of emails that would damage Hillary Clinton’s campaign.”**

According to Mr. Cohen, Mr. Trump replied,
“wouldn’t that be great.”

The testimony that Michael Cohen will provide today
is deeply disturbing.

We will all have to make our own evaluation of the
evidence and Mr. Cohen’s credibility.

As he admits, he has repeatedly lied in the past.

I agree with Ranking Member Jordan that this is an
important factor we all need to weigh.

But where I disagree fundamentally with the Ranking Member involves his efforts to prevent the American people from hearing from Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Cohen's testimony raises grave questions about the legality of the Donald Trump's conduct and the truthfulness of his statements while he was President.

We need to assess and investigate this new evidence as we uphold our constitutional oversight responsibilities.

And we will continue after today to gather more documents and testimony in our search for the truth.

The American people voted for accountability in November, and they have a right to hear Mr. Cohen in public so they can make their own judgments.

Mr. Cohen's testimony is the beginning of the process—not the end.

The days of this Committee protecting the President at all costs are over.

Before I close, I want to comment about the scope of today's hearing.

At the request of the House Intelligence Committee, I had intended—over the objections of the Ranking Member—to limit the scope of today’s hearing to avoid questions about Russia.

However, in Mr. Cohen’s written testimony, he has made statements relating to Russia, and these are topics that we understand do not raise concern from the Department of Justice.

So in fairness to the Ranking Member and all Committee Members, we will not restrict questions relating to the witness’ testimony or related questions he is willing to answer.

Finally, I remind Members that we still need to remain mindful of those areas where there are ongoing interests of the Department of Justice.

Those scoping limitations have not been changed.