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## NATIONAL SECURITY

## Former Giuliani associate raises questions about Hunter Biden's 'hard drive from hell'

Salacious documents supposedly belonging to Hunter Biden were circulating in Ukraine in May 2019, Lev Parnas says.



Lev Parnas, a Ukrainian-born businessman who was indicted last year on campaign finance charges. | Zach Gibson/Getty Images

By NATASHA BERTRAND  
10/24/2020 12:35 PM EDT



President Donald Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani was offered salacious photos and other documents belonging to Joe Biden’s son Hunter in the spring of 2019, earlier than previously known, according to one of Giuliani’s closest former associates.

And the alleged offer came from an intriguing source: a Ukrainian oligarch looking for help with a potential legal jam.

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The claim made by Lev Parnas, a Ukrainian-born businessman who was [indicted](#) last year on campaign finance charges, raises new questions about the provenance of the materials Giuliani has said he obtained recently from a computer repair shop in Delaware — and that he is now touting to accuse the Democratic nominee of corruption.

Parnas, who collaborated with Giuliani on the former New York mayor's quest to find damaging information on the Bidens beginning in late 2018, now says that similar materials were being offered to Giuliani just weeks after Joe Biden launched his presidential run.

"It was May 30, 2019 when we first heard about this stuff," Parnas said in an interview this week.

Democrats and former intelligence officials have raised questions about the Biden documents, alleging the leak of the materials could be part of a wide-ranging Russian effort to interfere in American politics on Trump's behalf. Neither Hunter Biden nor his lawyer have confirmed the materials are real, though the FBI has indicated it now has custody of the younger Biden's laptop hard drive.

But Parnas' narrative suggests Giuliani might have first learned about at least some of the content on the so-called "the hard drive from hell" through other means — from a Ukrainian contact searching for help in fending off any legal issues with the Justice Department. And as Giuliani embarked on a mission to get his hands on the materials, other actors in Ukraine were trying to profit from them, according to a person who was approached by someone trying to sell the explicit photos and emails for millions of dollars.

The computer repair shop owner, a Trump supporter named John Paul Mac Isaac, has told the following story: An unknown man dropped off three damaged laptops at his store in April 2019, then did not return to claim them. Isaac surmised the laptops belonged to Hunter Biden, but he could not reach him to return the devices. So he made copies of the hard drives and shared them with an attorney for Giuliani, according to accounts he gave the New York Post and other news outlets. He also at some point engaged with the FBI, though he has given conflicting accounts of whether he first contacted the bureau or vice versa.

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But according to Parnas, Giuliani was first told about the existence of explicit photos — which he said included pictures of Hunter Biden with a crack pipe in his mouth and engaging in sexual acts — and private communications pertaining to Hunter and Joe Biden on May 30, 2019. The timing of the meeting also suggests Giuliani was made aware of these materials well before Mac Isaac first made contact with either the FBI in December 2019 or with Giuliani’s lawyer, who Mac Isaac gave the alleged hard drive on Aug. 29, 2020, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Giuliani did not return multiple requests for comment. On Friday night, he defended the authenticity of the harddrive and its content on his podcast, adding cryptically: “It’s corroborated with me internally with secret information that I have about Hunter Biden that could only be on here. You think I don’t have other witnesses?”

Parnas’ account also involves Mykola Zlochevsky, the founder of Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company that paid Hunter Biden to serve on its board while his father was vice president. Zlochevsky [has long been pursued](#) by Ukrainian authorities on corruption and money-laundering charges and was hoping to avoid additional scrutiny by the U.S., Parnas said.

According to Parnas, a Zlochevsky associate named Vitaly Pruss told Giuliani during the May 30th meeting that the Burisma founder had the allegedly

derogatory information and was willing to give it to Giuliani if he could help the oligarch curry favor with the Justice Department.

It's not clear how Zlochevsky would have gotten the Hunter Biden material he was allegedly trying to leverage, or whether the material is the same as what was first published by the Post. But Parnas says Pruss suggested Hunter Biden's devices were compromised on a trip he took to Kazakhstan with Hunter Biden in 2014.

Pruss had been close with Hunter and his business partner Devon Archer in the past, Parnas said, helping them get the Burisma board seats and accompanying Biden on business trips. And he also served as Giuliani's go-between for business in Ukraine for more than a decade.

Parnas further alleges that Pruss told Giuliani during the meeting that Zlochevsky was not the only one with the information — the Russian security services had it, too, he said.

Biden campaign spokesman Andrew Bates said in a statement that “this news confirms what has long been known about the vile Russian campaign conducted with the active support of the president's own attorney and amplified by the president and his aides at every opportunity.”

Pruss did not return multiple requests for comment. He [told NBC last year](#) that he first met Parnas and his business partner, Igor Fruman, during a meeting with Giuliani in Paris in June 2019, which Parnas says is not true. Pruss also called Trump's impeachment “disgusting” and said he did not believe the president put pressure on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in exchange for investigations of the Bidens.

POLITICO was unable to verify Parnas' claims, though he provided text messages and documents he said showed that he helped set up and attended the May 30 meeting with Pruss, and subsequently served as a go-between for Giuliani, Pruss and Zlochevsky on issues related to Hunter Biden and Burisma. TIME Magazine [reported](#) earlier this week that at least two people were approached with offers to buy salacious Biden material in the spring and fall of 2019, raising similar questions about the original source of the photos and emails Giuliani gave to the New York Post.

Neither Hunter Biden nor his lawyer, George Mesires, has responded directly to claims that he dropped off his personal laptop at a Delaware repair shop in April 2019. Isaac, the repair shop owner, told the New York Post earlier this month that the customer who brought the laptop into the shop never retrieved it or its corresponding hard drive.

Mac Isaac, who is legally blind, said he assumed the customer was Hunter because one laptop had a Beau Biden Foundation sticker on it. But he said he could not be certain. A former colleague of Mac Isaac told POLITICO that "JP," as he was known, would need to get his face literally inches from any computer screen he was fixing and walked with a cane because of his poor eyesight.

In an interview [with reporters on Oct. 14](#), Mac Isaac called Trump's impeachment a "sham" and gave conflicting accounts of whether he first reached out to the FBI with the laptops after reviewing files on them, or whether the bureau first contacted him about the devices. He said he ultimately made a copy of the hard drive because he didn't want "to get murdered," and later gave it to a lawyer for Giuliani, Robert Costello.

A contract Mac Isaac provided to the Post, allegedly signed by Hunter, said the shop would consider the laptop “abandoned” if it had not been retrieved within 90 days of completion of the repair, which would have been late July 2019 — months after Pruss first informed Giuliani of the salacious Biden material, in Parnas’ telling. A document published by the Post and described as a grand jury subpoena compelling Mac Isaac’s testimony is dated Dec. 9, 2019.

Parnas said Giuliani was eager to get the information from Zlochevsky. He had Parnas send Pruss a series of questions for the oligarch with the goal of testing his knowledge and forthrightness about Hunter’s work for Burisma, and whether Zlochevsky ever met with Joe Biden while he was vice president.

The questions and Zlochevsky’s answers were included in a Microsoft Word document Parnas turned over to the House Intelligence Committee as part of the panel’s impeachment probe of Trump, which stemmed directly from Giuliani’s activities in Ukraine.

A GOP aide [told POLITICO earlier this year](#) that the document portrayed an “innocuous meeting with Ukrainian oligarch Mykola Zlochevsky.” But the truth, Parnas said, was more insidious — the exchange was part of an effort to

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Ultimately, Giuliani was not satisfied with the answers he got back on July 7, 2019. Asked, for example, whether Joe Biden, while vice president, had ever assisted Zlochevsky or Burisma “in any way with business deals or meetings with world leaders or any other assistance,” Zlochevsky replied curtly: “No.” Asked to detail any contacts he had with Joe Biden from 2013-2019, and whether Hunter ever facilitated any meetings, Zlochevsky replied: “No one from Burisma ever had any contacts with VP Biden or people working for him during Hunter Biden’s engagement.”

Giuliani was furious, Parnas recalled. “At that point, after seeing the answers, Rudy started pounding the table and saying, ‘We just need to get this information,’” he recalled. Giuliani then tasked Parnas with forging a relationship with Ukrainian billionaire Dmitry Firtash, who said he was willing to help in the search for Biden dirt, Parnas said.

In that same May 30 meeting, according to Parnas, Pruss mentioned that the “chief financial officer of Burisma” might also be willing to help, likely a reference to Alexander Gorbunenko, who served as CFO while Hunter Biden was on the board. Giuliani met with a relative of Gorbunenko, Denis Gorbunenko, in June 2019 in London, The Washington Post has previously reported.

It’s not clear whether Denis Gorbunenko gave Giuliani any of the material he was looking for at the time, but the day Parnas was arrested boarding a flight from Washington, D.C., to Vienna — Oct. 10 — was the day Giuliani was slated to meet with Alexander Gorbunenko and get “a package of information” from him on Hunter Biden, Parnas said.

He said he learned about the material Gorbunenko had from representatives for Firtash, a Ukrainian billionaire currently fighting extradition to the U.S. on bribery charges. But he doesn’t know what happened after that due to his arrest.

A few weeks before that scheduled Oct. 10 meeting, around Sept. 20, 2019,

attempts were being made to sell salacious Hunter Biden photos for millions of dollars, according to one person who was approached with the information. A Ukrainian lawyer claiming to represent an associate of Zlochevsky told the person that she had a harddrive with the photos, which — like Pruss had conveyed months earlier to Giuliani — purportedly showed Hunter Biden with drugs and a crack pipe.

The woman said her client was hoping to get several million dollars for it, said the person who was approached. He suggested she take the information to the FBI, but warned that the bureau probably wouldn't pay for it. She then asked whether “a tabloid” might pay for it, the person recalled.

He says he doesn't know what happened after that, but he mentioned it to an FBI contact in early 2020 who did not seem to take it very seriously — attempting to sell private information is commonplace in Ukraine. When the New York Post released the photos and emails purporting to come from Hunter's laptop hard drive, however, this person immediately recalled the material that had been offered to him one year prior.

The FBI is now actively investigating whether Russia was involved in the leak, or whether it is part of a broader malign influence operation, according to congressional aides briefed on the probe. The Senate Intelligence Committee is also actively involved in seeking clarity on the subject, the aides said.

*Ben Schreckinger, Andrew Desiderio, and Kyle Cheney contributed reporting.*

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