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Chairman Schiff Releases Opening Statement for Open Hearing With Ambassador Kurt Volker and Tim Morrison

Washington, DC — Today, Chairman Adam Schiff released his opening statement for the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence’s open hearing with Kurt Volker and Tim Morrison as part of the impeachment inquiry into President Donald J. Trump.

Full statement below as prepared:

This afternoon we will hear from two witnesses requested by the Minority, Ambassador Kurt Volker, the State Department’s Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations, and Tim Morrison, the former Senior Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council. I appreciate the Minority’s request for these two important witnesses, as well as Under Secretary of State David Hale, from whom we will hear tomorrow.

As we have heard from other witnesses, when Joe Biden was considering whether to enter the race for the Presidency in 2020, the President’s personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, began a campaign to weaken Vice President Biden’s candidacy by pushing Ukraine to investigate him and his son.

To clear away any obstacle to the scheme, days after the new Ukrainian President was elected, Trump ordered the recall of Marie Yovanovitch, the American ambassador in Kyiv, who was known for pushing anticorruption efforts. Trump also cancelled Vice President Mike Pence’s participation in the inauguration of President Zelensky on May 20 and instead sent a delegation headed by Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Ambassador to the European Union Gordan Sondland, and Ambassador Kurt Volker.

These three returned from Kyiv and briefed President Trump on their encouraging first interactions with the new Ukrainian administration. Hopes that Trump would agree to an early meeting with the Ukrainian President were soon diminished, however, when Trump pushed back. According to Volker, “He just didn’t believe it. He was skeptical. And he also said, that’s not what I hear. I hear, you know, he’s got some terrible people around him.” President Trump

also told them he believed that Ukraine “tried to take” him down. He told the three Amigos: “talk to Rudy.”

And they did. One of those interactions took place a week before the July 25 phone call between Trump and Zelensky, when Volker had breakfast with Rudy Giuliani at Trump Hotel. Volker testified that he pushed back on Giuliani’s accusation against Joe Biden. On July 22, just days before Trump would talk to Zelensky, Volker held a telephone conference with Giuliani and Andrey Yermak, a top advisor to the Ukrainian President, so that Giuliani could be introduced to Yermak.

On July 25th, the same day as the call between Trump and Zelensky, but before it took place, Volker sent a text message to Yermak: “heard from White House – assuming President Z convinces trump he will investigate/ “get to the bottom of what happened” in 2016, we will nail down date for a visit to Washington. Good luck!”

Later that day, Donald Trump would have the now infamous phone call with Zelensky in which he responded to the Ukrainian’s appreciation for U.S. defense support and request to buy more Javelin anti-tank missiles by saying, “I would like you to do us a favor, though.” And the favor involved the two investigations that Giuliani had been pushing for – into the Bidens and 2016. Volker was not on the call, but when asked about what it reflected, he testified that no president of the United States should ask a foreign leader to help interfere in a U.S. election.

Among those listening in on the July 25th call was Tim Morrison, who had taken over as the NSC’s Senior Director for European Affairs at the NSC only days before, but had been briefed by his predecessor, Fiona Hill, about the irregular second channel that was operating in parallel to the official one.

Like Col. Vindman and Ms. Williams from whom the committee heard this morning, Morrison emerged from the call troubled. He was concerned enough about what he heard on the July 25 call, that he went to see the NSC legal advisor soon after it had ended. Col. Vindman’s fear was that the President had broken the law, but Morrison said his concern was that the call could be damaging if it were leaked. Soon after this discussion with lawyers at the NSC, the call record was hidden away on a secure server used to store highly classified intelligence, where it remained until late September when the call record was publicly released.

Following the July 25th call, Volker worked with Sondland and the Ukrainian president’s close advisor Yermak on a statement that would satisfy Giuliani. When Yermak sent over a draft that still failed to include the specific words Burisma and 2016, Giuliani said the statement would lack credibility. Volker then added both Burisma and 2016 to the draft statement.

Both Volker and Morrison were, by late July, aware that the security assistance had been cut off at the direction of the President and acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney.

As the Ukrainians became aware of the suspension of security assistance and the negotiations over the scheduling of a White House meeting between Trump and Zelensky dragged on, the pressure increased and any pretense that there was no linkage soon dropped away.

Morrison accompanied Vice-President Pence to Warsaw on September 1, where Pence and Zelensky met and Zelensky raised the suspended security assistance. Following that meeting, Sondland approached Yermak to tell him that he believed that what could help them move the aid was if the [Ukrainian] prosecutor general would go to the mike and announce that he was opening the Burisma investigation.

On September 7, Ambassador Sondland had a telephone call with Trump and asked him what he wanted from Ukraine. According to Morrison, who spoke with Sondland after the call, Trump insisted that there was no quid pro quo, but President Zelensky must personally announce the opening of the investigations and he should want to do it. Sondland also said that, if President Zelensky didn't agree to make a public statement about the investigations, the U.S. and Ukraine would be at a stalemate—meaning, it would not receive the much-needed security assistance.

Morrison had “a sinking feeling” after the call as he realized that the ask was now being directed at Zelensky himself and not the Prosecutor General as Sondland had relayed to a senior Ukrainian aide in Warsaw on September 1. While Trump claimed there was no quid pro quo, his insistence that Zelensky himself publicly announce the investigations or they would be at a stalemate, made clear that at least two official acts — a White House meeting and \$400 million in military aid — were conditioned on receipt of what Trump wanted, the investigations to help his campaign.

The efforts to secure the investigations would continue for several more days, but appear to have abruptly ended soon after three Committees of Congress announced an investigation into the Trump-Giuliani Ukraine scheme. Only then, would the aid be released.

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