

# RealClear Investigations

By **Paul Sperry, RealClearInvestigations**

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For a town that leaks like a sieve, Washington has done an astonishingly effective job keeping from the American public the name of the anonymous “whistleblower” who triggered impeachment proceedings against President Trump — even though his identity is an open secret inside the Beltway.



More than two months after the official filed his complaint, pretty much all that’s known publicly about him is that he is a CIA analyst who at one point was detailed to the White House and is now back working at the CIA.

But the name of a government official fitting that description — Eric Ciaramella — has been raised privately in impeachment depositions, according to officials with direct knowledge of the proceedings, as well as in at least one open hearing held by a House committee not involved in the impeachment inquiry. Fearing their anonymous witness could be exposed, Democrats this week blocked Republicans from asking more questions about him and intend to redact his name from all deposition transcripts.

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RealClearInvestigations is disclosing the name because of the public’s interest in learning details of an effort to remove a sitting president from office. Further, the official’s status as a “whistleblower” is complicated by his being a hearsay reporter of accusations against the president, one who has “some indicia of an arguable political bias ... in favor of a rival political candidate” -- as the Intelligence Community Inspector General **phrased it** circumspectly in originally fielding his complaint.

Federal documents reveal that the 33-year-old Ciaramella, a registered Democrat held over from the Obama White House, previously worked with former Vice President Joe Biden and former CIA Director John Brennan, a vocal critic of Trump who helped initiate the Russia “collusion” investigation of the Trump campaign during the 2016 election.

Further, Ciaramella (pronounced char-a-MEL-ah) left his National Security Council posting in the White House’s West Wing in mid-2017 amid concerns about negative leaks to the media. He has since returned to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

“He was accused of working against Trump and leaking against Trump,” said a former NSC official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

Also, Ciaramella huddled for “guidance” with the staff of House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, including former colleagues also held over from the Obama era whom Schiff’s office had recently recruited from the NSC. Schiff is the lead prosecutor in the impeachment inquiry.



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And Ciaramella worked with a Democratic National Committee operative who dug up dirt on the Trump campaign during the 2016 election, inviting her into the White House for meetings, former White House colleagues said. The operative, Alexandra Chalupa, a Ukrainian-American who supported Hillary Clinton, led an effort to link the Republican campaign to the Russian government. "He knows her. He had her in the White House," said one former co-worker, who requested anonymity to discuss the

sensitive matter.



Chalupa: DNC oppo  
as invited to the Obama  
by Ciaramella.  
ivelleTV/YouTube

Documents confirm the DNC opposition researcher attended at least one White House meeting with Ciaramella in November 2015. She visited the White House with a number of Ukrainian officials lobbying the Obama administration for aid for Ukraine.

With Ciaramella's name long under wraps, interest in the intelligence analyst is so high that a handful of former colleagues have compiled a roughly 40-page research dossier on him. A classified version of the document is circulating on Capitol Hill, and briefings have been conducted based on it. One briefed Republican has been planning to unmask the whistleblower in a speech on the House floor.

On the Internet, meanwhile, Ciaramella's name for weeks has been bandied about on Twitter feeds and intelligence blogs as the suspected person who blew the whistle on the president. The mainstream media are also aware of his name.



Fred Fleitz, Trump adviser: "Everyone knows who he is."  
fredfleitz.com/Wikimedia

"Everyone knows who he is. CNN knows. The Washington Post knows. The New York Times knows. Congress knows. The White House knows. Even the president knows who he is," said Fred Fleitz, a former CIA analyst and national security adviser to Trump, who has fielded dozens of calls from the media.

Yet a rare hush has swept across the Potomac. The usually gossipy nation's capital remains uncharacteristically — and curiously — mum, especially considering the magnitude of this story, only the fourth presidential impeachment inquiry in U.S. history.

Trump supporters blame the conspiracy of silence on a "corrupt" and "biased" media trying to protect the whistleblower from justified scrutiny of his political motives. They also complain Democrats have falsely claimed that exposing his identity would violate

whistleblower protections, even though the relevant statute provides limited, not blanket, anonymity — and doesn't cover press disclosures. His Democrat attorneys, meanwhile, have warned that outing him would put him and his family "at risk of harm," although government security personnel have been assigned to protect him.

"They're hiding him," Fleitz asserted. "They're hiding him because of his political bias."

A CIA officer specializing in Russia and Ukraine, Ciaramella was detailed over to the National Security Council from the agency in the summer of 2015, working under Susan Rice, President Obama's national security adviser. He also worked closely with the former vice president.

Federal records show that Biden's office invited Ciaramella to an October 2016 state



Ciaramella worked under national security adviser John Bolton. Photo by Ryan Kaster, File

luncheon the vice president hosted for Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. Other invited guests included Brennan, as well as then-FBI Director James Comey and then-National Intelligence Director James Clapper.

Several U.S. officials told RealClearInvestigations that the invitation that was extended to Ciaramella, a relatively low-level GS-13 federal employee, was unusual and signaled he was politically connected inside the Obama White House.

Former White House officials said Ciaramella worked on Ukrainian policy issues for Biden in 2015 and 2016, when the vice president was President Obama's "point man" for Ukraine. A Yale graduate, Ciaramella is said to speak Russian and Ukrainian, as well as Arabic. He had been assigned to the NSC by Brennan.

He was held over into the Trump administration, and headed the Ukraine desk at the NSC, eventually transitioning into the West Wing, until June 2017.

"He was moved over to the front office" to temporarily fill a vacancy, said a former White House official, where he "saw everything, read everything."

The official added that it soon became clear among NSC staff that Ciaramella opposed the new Republican president's foreign policies. "My recollection of Eric is that he was very smart and very passionate, particularly about Ukraine and Russia. That was his thing – Ukraine," he said. "He didn't exactly hide his passion with respect to what he thought was the right thing to do with Ukraine and Russia, and his views were at odds with the president's policies."

"So I wouldn't be surprised if he was the whistleblower," the official said.

In May 2017, Ciaramella went "outside his chain of command," according to a former NSC co-worker, to send an email alerting another agency that Trump happened to hold a meeting with Russian diplomats in the Oval Office the day after firing Comey, who led the Trump-Russia investigation. The email also noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin had phoned the president a week earlier.

Contents of the email appear to have ended up in the media, which reported Trump boasted to the Russian officials about firing Comey, whom he allegedly called "crazy, a real nut job."

In effect, Ciaramella helped generate the "Putin fired Comey" narrative, according to the research dossier making the rounds in Congress, a copy of which was obtained by RealClearInvestigations.

Ciaramella allegedly argued that "President Putin suggested that President Trump fire Comey," the report said. "In the days after Comey's firing, this presidential action was used to further political and media calls for the standup [sic] of the special counsel to investigate 'Russia collusion.'"

In the end, Special Counsel Robert Mueller found no conspiracy between Trump and Putin. Ciaramella's email was cited in a footnote in his report, which mentions only Ciaramella's name, the date and the recipients "Kelly et al." Former colleagues said the main recipient was then-Homeland Security Director John Kelly.



Ciaramella left the Trump White House soon after Mueller was appointed. Attempts to reach Ciaramella were unsuccessful, although his father said in a phone interview from Hartford, where he is a bank executive, that he doubted his son was the whistleblower. "He didn't have that kind of access to that kind of information," Tony Ciaramella said. "He's just a guy going to work every day." The whistleblower's lawyers did not answer emails and phone calls seeking comment. CIA spokesman



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Luis Rossello declined comment, saying, "Anything on the whistleblower, we are referring to ODNI." The Office of the Director of National Intelligence did not respond to requests for comment.

In his **complaint**, the whistleblower charged that the president used "the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 U.S. election." Specifically, he cited a controversial July 25 phone call from the White House residence in which Trump asked Ukraine's new president to help investigate the origins of the Russia "collusion" investigation the Obama administration initiated against his campaign, citing reports that "a lot of it started with Ukraine," where the former pro-Hillary Clinton regime in Kiev worked with Obama diplomats and Chalupa to try to "**sabotage**" Trump's run for president.

Later in the **conversation**, Trump also requested information about Biden and his son, since "Biden went around bragging that he" had fired the chief Ukrainian prosecutor at the time a Ukrainian oligarch, who gave Biden's son a lucrative seat on the board of his energy conglomerate, was under investigation for corruption.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Intelligence Committee Chairman Schiff argued the whistleblower's complaint, though admittedly based on second-hand information, amounts to an impeachable offense, and they subsequently launched an impeachment inquiry that has largely been conducted in secret.

The whistleblower filed his "urgent" report against Trump with the intelligence community inspector general on Aug. 12, but it was not publicly released until Sept. 26.

Prior to filing, he had met with Schiff's Democratic staff for "guidance." At first, the California lawmaker denied the contacts, but later admitted that his office did, in fact, meet with the whistleblower early on.



One of Ciaramella's  
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Earlier this year, Schiff recruited two of Ciaramella's closest allies at the NSC — both whom were also Obama holdovers -- to join his committee staff. He hired one, Sean Misko, in August — the same month the whistleblower complaint was filed.

During closed-door depositions taken in the impeachment inquiry, Misko has been observed handing notes to the lead counsel for the impeachment inquiry, Daniel Goldman, as he asks questions of Trump administration witnesses, officials with direct knowledge of the proceedings told RealClearInvestigations.

Republicans participating in the restricted inquiry hearings have been asking witnesses about Ciaramella and repeatedly injecting his name into the deposition record, angering Schiff and Democrats, who sources say are planning to scrub the references to Ciaramella from any transcripts of the hearings they may agree to release.

"Their reaction tells you something," said one official familiar with the inquiry.

For example, sources said Ciaramella's name was invoked by GOP committee members during the closed-door testimony of former NSC official Fiona Hill on Oct. 14. Ciaramella worked with Hill, a transplant from the liberal Brookings Institution, in the West Wing.

During Tuesday's deposition of NSC official Alexander Vindman, Democrats shut down a line of inquiry by Republicans because they said it risked revealing the identity

of the whistleblower. Republicans wanted to know with whom Vindman spoke within the administration about his concerns regarding Trump's call to Ukraine. But Schiff instructed the witness not to answer the questions, which **reportedly** sparked a shouting match between Democrats and Republicans.

Determined to keep the whistleblower's identity secret, Schiff recently announced it may not be necessary for him to testify even in closed session. Republicans argue that by hiding his identity, the public cannot assess his motives for striking out against the president. And they worry his political bias could color inquiry testimony and findings unless it's exposed.

Rep. Jim Jordan, the top Republican on the House Oversight Committee, asserted the American people have the right to know the person who is trying to bring down the president for whom 63 million voted.

"It's tough to determine someone's credibility if you can't put them under oath and ask them questions," he said.

Added Jordan: "The people want to know. I want to get to the truth."



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In an open House Natural Resources Committee hearing last week, Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Texas) seemingly out of left field asked a witness about "Eric Ciaramella of the Obama National Security Council," in what the Washington press corps took as a bid to out the whistleblower. He later told a Dallas radio station he knew the whistleblower's name. "A lot of us in Washington know who it is," Gohmert said, adding he's a "very staunch Democrat" who was "supposed to be a point person on Ukraine, during the time when Ukraine was its most corrupt, and he didn't blow any whistles on their corruption."

The Washington Post ran a **news story** over the weekend critical of Republicans for allegedly trying to "unmask" the whistleblower, for attempting to do the job journalists would normally do. Last week, the paper ran an **op-ed by the whistleblower's attorneys** claiming he was no longer relevant to the inquiry and beseeching the public to let their client slip back into obscurity.

For its part, the New York Times ran a **story** last month reporting details about the whistleblower's background, but stopped short of fully identifying him, suggesting it didn't know his politics or even his name. "Little else is known about him," the paper claimed.

On Thursday, Democrats plan a House vote on new impeachment-inquiry rules that would give Republicans for the first time the ability to call their own witnesses. Only their requests must first be approved by the Democrats. So there is a good chance the whistleblower, perhaps the most important witness of all, will remain protected from critical examination.

### Correction, Nov. 9, 2019, 6:43 AM Eastern

An earlier version of this article misstated the prior employment of former National Security Council official Fiona Hill. She was a transplant from the liberal Brookings Institution, not an Obama administration holdover.

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