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Hope Hicks Acknowledges She Sometimes Tells White Lies for Trump

By Nicholas Fandos

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Update: Hope Hicks announced on Wednesday that she was resigning as White House communications director. For the latest updates and further coverage, read here.

WASHINGTON — Hope Hicks, the White House communications director, told House investigators on Tuesday that her work for President Trump, who has a reputation for exaggerations and outright falsehoods, had occasionally required her to tell white lies.

But after extended consultation with her lawyers, she insisted that she had not lied about matters material to the investigations into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election and possible links to Trump associates, according to three people familiar with her testimony.

The exchange came during more than eight hours of private testimony before the House Intelligence Committee. Ms. Hicks declined to answer similar questions about other figures from the Trump campaign or the White House.

She also pointedly and repeatedly declined to answer questions about the presidential transition or her time in the White House, lawmakers who sat in on the testimony said, telling investigators that she had been asked by the White House to discuss only her time on the campaign. They added that she did not formally invoke executive privilege.

A lawyer for Ms. Hicks declined to comment.

The committee, which has been investigating Russia's meddling for nearly a year, has increasingly found itself butting up against the White House over similar claims by witnesses.

When Stephen K. Bannon, who served as Mr. Trump's chief strategist until he was forced out in August, similarly refused to testify about his work for the presidential transition team and the White House, Republicans on the committee quickly subpoenaed him. Mr. Bannon continued to refuse to talk about those subjects, and lawmakers are weighing whether to initiate contempt proceedings.

There was no indication that Republicans would subpoena Ms. Hicks.

Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the committee, said Republicans were applying a double standard to Mr. Bannon — who has been exiled from Mr. Trump's circles after disparaging the Trump children in a book by the author Michael Wolff — and all other witnesses. He urged Republicans who control the committee to subpoena Ms. Hicks.

“That’s an overly broad claim of privilege that I don’t think any court of law would sustain. And I think the White House knows that,” Mr. Schiff said. “This is not executive privilege, it is executive stonewalling.”

Members of the committee said that under pressure from lawmakers, Ms. Hicks and her lawyers had consulted the White House during the interview and determined that she could answer limited questions about her work on the transition.

Still, Mr. Schiff said that important questions had been left unaddressed.

A fixture of Mr. Trump's inner circle throughout the campaign and in the White House, Ms. Hicks is viewed as a valuable witness by investigators. She was involved in the firing of James B. Comey as F.B.I. director in May and the drafting of a statement in July in response to questions about a 2016 meeting at Trump Tower between Russians and top Trump campaign officials. The statement and its drafting have attracted the interest of the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III.

Ms. Hicks refused to answer questions about both, lawmakers said.

Investigators working for Mr. Mueller interviewed Ms. Hicks over two days in December. She has also testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The interview was the committee's first in more than a month. Democrats and Republicans have spent the better part of that time bitterly wrangling over a Republican memo accusing the F.B.I. and the Justice Department of abusing their powers to spy on a former Trump campaign aide, Carter Page.

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