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# Listen: Audio of Trump discussing whistleblower at private event: 'That's close to a spy'

Listen: Trump slams whistleblower at private event



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Los Angeles Times

STAFF WRITER

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3:57 PM



WASHINGTON — President Trump expressed disgust Thursday morning with the explosive whistleblower [complaint](#), slamming the intelligence officer and the White House aides who helped him as “almost a spy” and suggested it was treason.

Speaking at a private event with U.S. diplomatic officials in New York, Trump described reporters as “scum” and raged at the Democrats’ new impeachment proceedings, which were spurred by the whistleblower’s complaint alleging that Trump tried to strong-arm Ukraine’s leader to interfere in the 2020 election.

The still-unidentified intelligence officer acknowledged that he did not listen to Trump’s July 25 phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, but [cited accounts](#) from more than half a dozen White House and other officials over the last four months as part of “official interagency business.”

“Basically, that person never saw the report, never saw the call, he never saw the call — *heard* something and decided that he or she, or whoever the hell they saw — they’re almost a spy,” Trump said.

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“I want to know who’s the person, who’s the person who gave the whistleblower the information? Because that’s close to a spy,” he continued. “You know what we used to do in the old days when we were smart? Right? The spies and treason, we used to handle it a little differently than we do now.”

A few attendees laughed at the casually menacing remark, but the ballroom at the Intercontinental Hotel in New York stayed mostly silent.

A person attending the event provided the Los Angeles Times with a recording of the president’s remarks. The event was arranged so the president could thank the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, and her staff as he wound up four days of meetings around the U.N. General Assembly.



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Trump spoke just as Joseph Maguire, the acting director of national intelligence, was [defending the whistleblower](#) at a hearing by the House Intelligence Committee, saying the individual “did the right thing” and followed the law “every step of the way.”



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Rep. Adam B. Schiff (D-Burbank), who heads the committee and led the questioning of Maguire, said later that Trump’s crude comments in New York were intended to intimidate witnesses in the fast-moving impeachment inquiry.

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“It’s pretty clear the president is going to make [the inquiry] as difficult as possible, and do so in as dangerous and unethical a way as possible,” he added.

Schiff later issued a formal statement on the matter along with Rep. Eliot L. Engel, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, chairman of the Oversight Committee, warning the president to end such intimidation efforts.

“President Trump is fully aware that our committees are seeking testimony from this whistleblower and others referenced in the whistleblower’s complaint released today as part of the House’s impeachment inquiry, and our nation’s laws prohibit efforts to discourage, intimidate or otherwise pressure a witness not to provide testimony to Congress,” the statement read in part.

The president has often expressed nostalgia for the raw violence of bygone days, and his rhetoric has been cited by some who have resorted to physical violence.

His remarks Thursday drew harsh criticism from former national security officials, Democratic lawmakers and whistleblower advocates.

“As we have seen not only this week, but throughout the history of this nation, whistleblowers are vital to protecting democracy, the rule of law, and our Constitution,” said Louis Clark, executive director of the Government Accountability Project, a nonpartisan group. “Whistleblowers should be celebrated and protected, not targeted.”

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The president brought up the whistleblower almost as soon as he began his remarks on a podium in front of a blue backdrop in the low-ceilinged ballroom, again claiming that his phone call with Zelensky was “perfect.”

The White House [released its account](#) of the call on Wednesday in response to a whistleblower’s complaint. After Zelensky asked to be interviewed, the White House

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In his remarks, Trump cited his awkward meeting with Zelensky on Wednesday where both leaders were asked about the implicit quid pro quo detailed in the call summary and whistleblower complaint.

“They said, ‘Was he pressuring you?’” Trump said, describing the question to Zelensky, who responded that he hadn’t felt any “push,” but also said he didn’t want to get involved in a U.S. political squabble.

“You know, these animals in the press,” Trump went on. “They’re animals, some of the worst human beings you’ll ever meet.”

Someone in the room shouted out “Fake news!” egging the president on.

“They’re scum,” Trump continued. “Many of them are scum, and then you have some good reporters, but not many of them, I’ll be honest with you.”

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He then accused Sen. Christopher S. Murphy (D-Con

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“Democratic senators went over there and strong-armed the guy,” Trump said, affecting Murphy’s voice for a moment. “You better damn well do this or you’re not going to get any money from Congress.’ Oh, I see, that’s OK?”

“And then you have Sleepy Joe Biden, who’s dumb as a rock,” Trump went on. “This guy was dumb on his best day and he’s not having his best day right now. He’s dumb as a rock. So you have Sleepy Joe and his kid, who’s got a lot of problems, he got thrown out of the Navy — look, I’m not going to, it’s a problem ... so we won’t get into why. He got thrown out of the Navy and now this kid goes into Ukraine, walks away with millions of dollars, he becomes a consultant for \$50,000 a month and he doesn’t know anything compared to anybody at this firm. He’s a stiff. He knows nothing. He’s walking away with \$50,000.”

Hunter Biden was discharged from the Navy in 2014 after testing positive for cocaine. From 2014 to 2019, he served on the board of Burisma Holdings, Ukraine’s largest private gas company, whose owner came under scrutiny by Ukrainian prosecutors for possible abuse of power and unlawful enrichment. Hunter Biden was not accused of any wrongdoing in the investigation.

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Trump, as he continued to speak, expressed further dismay that he is the one being investigated, not Biden.

“They’re talking about me and I didn’t do anything,” he said, hedging slightly. “I don’t know if I’m the most innocent person in the world.”

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