Trump elevates Mulvaney aide weeks after he defied impeachment subpoena

Robert Blair will be the special representative for international telecommunications policy.
President Donald Trump has promoted a central figure in the House impeachment inquiry who defied a subpoena to testify.

Trump on Monday named Robert Blair — a top aide to acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney — as the special representative for international telecommunications policy, a position that puts Blair in a central role atop a U.S. effort to “promote a secure and reliable global telecommunications system.”

“In this new capacity, Mr. Blair will support the Administration’s 5G efforts led by the Assistant to the President for Economy Policy, Larry Kudlow,” the White House said in a statement. “Mr. Blair will continue to serve as Assistant to the President and the Senior Advisor to the Chief of Staff.”

Democrats subpoenaed Blair on Nov. 3 to testify about his awareness of Trump’s order to hold military aid to Ukraine, which they allege was part of an effort to coerce an ally — desperately fighting off a Russian invasion — to investigate his political rivals. Blair refused to appear for a Nov. 4 deposition under orders from the White House.
“Some of that evidence has revealed that Mr. Blair was a percipient witness to the President’s misconduct,” Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said in a closed-door meeting on Nov. 4, according to a transcript released by the panel last month. “We can only infer, therefore, that the White House’s effort to block Mr. Blair from testifying is to prevent the committees from learning additional evidence of Presidential misconduct and that Mr. Blair’s testimony would corroborate and confirm other witnesses’ accounts of such misconduct, including Mr. Mulvaney’s admission from the White House Briefing Room that the Ukraine military aid was frozen by the President in order to pressure Ukraine into initiating investigations into the Bidens and the 2016 election.”

The House impeached Trump last week for abuse of power in his posture toward Ukraine as well as efforts to thwart the Intelligence Committee’s investigation into the president’s effort to press Ukraine to investigate his political rivals. Democrats say Trump withheld $391 million in military aid from Ukraine as leverage, but top officials who handled Trump’s order have refused to testify, acting on the president’s direction.

Senate Democrats preparing for Trump’s impeachment trial have requested a slate of witnesses previously blocked by the White House, including Blair, whose testimony they say would shed light on the decision to withhold aid.
Blair was among senior administration officials included on email threads by the U.S. ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland, who helped spearhead conversations with top Ukrainians about launching investigations sought by Trump.
Trump abandons sweeping vape ban with new slimmed-down rules