

## **AP sources: Raid related to payments to women accusing Trump**

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal agents who raided the office of President Donald Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, were looking for information about payments to a former Playboy playmate and a porn actress who claim to have had affairs with Trump, two people familiar with the investigation said Tuesday.

Public corruption prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan are trying to determine if there was any fraud related to the payments to Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels, according to one of the people. McDougal, a former playmate, was paid \$150,000 by the parent company of the National Enquirer for her story, though the magazine never published it. Cohen paid \$130,000 to Daniels as part of an agreement, made before the 2016 election, to keep her from going public with her allegations.

A warrant used in the raid Monday specifically authorized agents to seize records related to McDougal, said one of the people, who demanded anonymity to discuss the confidential details.

The payments appear to be part of a pattern of Trump's self-described fixer trying to shield the businessman-turned-politician from embarrassing press by buying women's silence.



Federal agents on Monday raided the office of President Donald Trump's personal attorney Michael Cohen, seizing records on topics including a \$130,000 payment made to a porn actress who says she had sex with Trump more than a decade ago. (April 9)

The new details on the Cohen raid, first reported by The New York Times, emerged as the president boiled over on Twitter about it and amid evidence that investigators are zeroing in on his inner circle. The raid on Cohen was not carried out by special counsel Robert Mueller's team but instead by federal authorities in New York.

Still, the president's ire has been directed at Mueller and his boss, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. On Monday, Trump called Mueller's investigation "an attack on our country" and suggested he was considering firing the special counsel.

The White House remained defiant that the president has the power to directly fire Mueller — despite Justice Department regulations saying otherwise. The regulations say only Rosenstein, who appointed Mueller last May, has the authority to fire him and only for specific cause. Rosenstein has repeatedly said that he has not seen any reason to dismiss Mueller.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Tuesday that Trump "certainly believes he has the power" to fire Mueller, though he isn't taking that step now. She echoed Trump's frustration, saying he believes federal authorities have "gone too far" by seizing communication between a lawyer and his clients.

The furious president himself blasted out his displeasure early Tuesday, saying on Twitter: "Attorney-client privilege is dead!"

In fact, attorney-client privilege is not absolute and can't be invoked when the discussion was part of an effort to commit a crime. The search was authorized by a judge and no evidence suggests it was carried out improperly.

The search did not appear related to allegations of Russian election interference or possible coordination with the Trump campaign, the main focus of Mueller's probe. But the raid was prompted, at least in part, by evidence or allegations uncovered by Mueller's team.

Under Justice Department regulations, Mueller must consult with Rosenstein when his investigators uncover new evidence that may fall outside his original mandate. Rosenstein then determines whether to allow Mueller to proceed or to assign the matter to another U.S. attorney or another part of the Justice Department.

FBI agents searched Cohen's office, apartment and a hotel room where he's been staying while his home is under renovation, looking for documents related to Daniels and McDougal.

McDougal has said she carried on an affair with Trump in 2006 after the birth of his son. The Enquirer's publisher, American Media Inc., said they paid McDougal for details of the alleged affair, but they never appeared in print. AMI has said she was paid to become a fitness columnist.

Cohen's attorney, Stephen Ryan, did not respond to questions about McDougal on Tuesday.

Agents also seized records related to a \$130,000 payment made to Daniels, who says she had sex with Trump the same year as McDougal. Daniels' team has had extensive communications with federal investigators, said a third person familiar with the investigations, who demanded anonymity to discuss the confidential matter.

Cohen has said he paid Daniels out of his own pocket shortly before the 2016 presidential election, but has not explained why.

Several former officials at the Federal Election Commission have said the payment could have violated campaign finance laws, because it may amount to an unreported campaign donation.

Cohen has said neither the Trump Organization nor the Trump campaign was involved in the transaction with Daniels and he was not reimbursed for the payment. Trump has said he didn't know about the payment. The White House has consistently said Trump denies the affair.

In his first public comments since the raid, Cohen told CNN on Tuesday that he is rethinking how he handled the payment to Daniels because of what it's done to his family. He also praised the FBI agents who carried out the search as "professional, courteous and respectful."

Asked if he was worried, Cohen told CNN: "I would be lying to you if I told that I am not. Do I need this in my life? No. Do I want to be involved in this? No."

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Hays reported from New York. Associated Press writers Michael Balsamo in Los Angeles, Jake Pearson in New York and Tom LoBianco and Catherine Lucey in Washington contributed to this report.