

Audio expert analyzes secret Trump-Cohen tape

Marshall Cohen,
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(*CNN*) — The debate over a secret recording between Donald Trump and his longtime attorney Michael Cohen continued Wednesday, with both sides offering different explanations of what was heard on the tape.

CNN hired an audio forensics expert on Wednesday to review the tape and determine what is heard, what isn't heard and figure out what clues can be gleaned from the nearly three-minute clip.

In a recording from September 2016, Cohen mentions a plan to buy the rights to a story that Playboy model Karen McDougal allegedly had an affair with Trump years ago. The tape confirms that Trump knew about the payment discussion in real time, while his campaign had denied knowing anything about the topic.

Trump's legal team admits the conversation was about the possible payment, but says it was not illegal. No payment was ever made from Trump, Rudy Giuliani, the President's attorney, has said. Giuliani has previously acknowledged that the recorded discussion related to the buying the story rights.

Other parts of the recording, provided to CNN by Cohen's lawyer Lanny Davis, are less clear. One key question: What exactly did Trump say about "cash" when Cohen brought up the financing arrangement?

CNN commissioned an independent analysis of the tape by audio forensics expert Ed Primeau. He has worked in the industry for over 30 years and has provided testimony as an expert witness in hundreds of cases. Primeau says he has performed thousands of audio enhancements throughout his career.

CNN did not provide Primeau a transcript and asked him to create one based on what he heard in his analysis.

In the tape, Cohen said "we'll have to pay" to purchase the rights to McDougal's story. The audio forensics expert concluded that Trump then responded with, "I'll pay with cash," to which Cohen immediately replied, "no, no, no," several times, appearing to reject the idea of paying with cash.

Primeau said his analysis was completed with tools that enhance volume, isolate dialogue and examine soundwaves on a screen. He said he asked another expert at his firm to weigh in and they reached the same conclusion.

"I was in the room all day today. I enhanced the recording," Primeau said on CNN's "Cuomo Prime Time" Wednesday. "I listened to the words and I typed them as I

heard them. I didn't know anything about this story prior to starting. So remaining unbiased was a key into the work that I did. And I stand behind what I've transcribed and presented tonight for your show."

Giuliani disputed this on Tuesday night and provided an alternate transcript that claimed Trump was giving an instruction to Cohen and told his longtime fixer, "don't pay with cash."

Primeau said he was not aware of this dispute before he performed his forensic analysis on Wednesday, and he did not watch any news reports about the recording when the story broke Tuesday night.

After being told Giuliani's explanation, Primeau said he didn't hear "don't" in the recording and also didn't observe any soundwaves consistent with the word "don't." Primeau noted that other experts could reasonably believe that Trump said "don't," but that isn't what he observed in the tape.

"Dueling experts can come to different conclusions," Giuliani said in a statement to CNN about the independent analysis. "In context, using cash would make no sense because the transaction is between two corporations."

Primeau also noted that the conversation, as broadcast for the first time Tuesday night on CNN, was clearly cut off at the end of the tape. The conversation about the potential payment appears to have been interrupted in the middle of Trump saying what sounds like "check," and abruptly cuts to a different person for a few seconds.

Primeau said he doesn't regularly follow the news so he can "stay unbiased" in his work. He hasn't given money to political candidates, according to Federal Election Commission records.

CNN's Veronica Stracqualursi contributed to this report.