

Team Trump, Including a Fox Host, Go All-In on Pushing Doctored Pelosi Videos

Justin Baragona

The Daily Beast, 05.23.19

‘What is wrong with Nancy Pelosi?’ Giuliani wrote. ‘Her speech pattern is bizarre.’

President Trump’s close advisers are increasingly pining for Robert Mueller to be dragged before Congress and subjected to conservative lawmakers’ questions about the conduct and outcome of his investigation.

Their embrace of such a hearing is a sharp reversal in White House sentiment over the past few weeks since the release of the special counsel’s report. Trump himself [has come out against](#) Mueller testifying before Congress, and key Republicans on Capitol Hill have followed suit by stating that the issue is effectively “closed.”

But those positions have softened, if not changed, significantly after Mueller’s public statement on Wednesday, in which he stated that he would have exonerated Trump if he could have and said that he was prohibited by Department of Justice guidelines from bringing charges against a sitting president.

“If they allow [GOP Reps.] Meadows and Jordan and few of the others there, they’ll eviscerate him more than they did [Michael Cohen](#),” said Rudy Giuliani, President Trump’s personal attorney during and after the Mueller probe. Giuliani said it would be “emotionally satisfying to have” Mueller testify and that “in terms of the politics of it, I would love to have him testify. I think he’s afraid to.”

The former New York City mayor and current Trump lawyer said he’d spoken to the president both before and after Mueller’s televised statement to the press. Asked to describe Trump’s views, Giuliani told The Daily Beast that all he could say was, “I can sum up his feelings as: Nothing new, no new facts, it’s all smoke and mirrors, so what?” Of Mueller’s conduct, he added: “I’m angrier about this than [Trump] is.”

Mueller’s announcement on Wednesday was a dramatic coda to a two-year investigation in which he never spoke publicly. Appearing at the Department of Justice, he said he was formally ending his service as special counsel and then summarized the main findings of his report. After a little over nine minutes, Mueller expressed his desire not to testify before Congress and declined to take questions from journalists.

“The report is my testimony,” he explained.

Denizens of Trumpworld were left enraged by the appearance, believing Mueller had taken the opportunity to call Trump’s innocence into question without having to be pressed on how he came to his conclusions. During his broadcast later that

evening, Fox News host Sean Hannity fantasized about Trump-aligned lawmakers placing Mueller under oath and grilling him.

“If you are wondering whether or not Mueller is open to transparency [and] accountability in this deeply flawed investigation, think again,” Hannity [said](#). “Oh, Bob Mueller does not want to answer questions [from] Jim Jordan, Mark Meadows, [Matt Gaetz](#), and other Republicans.”

Hannity is a [close friend and adviser of Trump's](#) and his broadcasts often serve as an indicator of where the president's mind is on any given subject.

Giuliani said he would like Republican lawmakers to grill Mueller about matters such as whether his team ever leaked damaging information to reporters and how former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort was treated in solitary confinement. Other prominent Trump allies said they agreed with the idea that Mueller needed to be called before lawmakers, if only to provide Republicans with the opportunity to pepper him on topics such as the composition of his team of investigators and the evidentiary foundations of his investigation.

“[The Mueller Report was] one of the most dishonest reports ever rendered, and I think the Republicans could take it apart upon examination,” John Dowd, a lawyer who repped the president for nearly a year of the Mueller probe, told The Daily Beast on Thursday. “[Bob Mueller] doesn't want to go up there. It's obvious he's pulled a fast one.” Dowd, [who still informally advises Trump](#) and his legal team, added that it would be “great to get him up there” so that GOP lawmakers could “take him apart.”

“I think it would be really wonderful if Bob Mueller were to testify. I hope he does. I hope he has a respirator with him when he does it.”

— Joseph diGenova, informal legal adviser to President Trump

Joseph diGenova, an informal legal adviser to the president, echoed those sentiments. “I think it would be really wonderful if Bob Mueller were to testify. I hope he does. I hope he has a respirator with him when he does it,” he said in a brief interview. “I think there are many questions to ask him that are legitimate, given the damage that he caused by letting the investigation fester for two years.” DiGenova said he has a list of questions for Mueller that he has “already provided to people” but would not specify if he had shared this list with Trump or anyone else in the administration or in Congress.

Asked for comment on this story, a White House spokesman referred The Daily Beast to the president's past statements on how it was up to Attorney General William Barr to decide whether Mueller testifies.

While Trump's advisers are increasingly itching for Mueller to be called before lawmakers, not all Republicans, including many of those lawmakers, are on board with the idea.

Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the House and a current outside adviser to Trump, told The Daily Beast that the savvy move for congressional Republicans would be to use whatever investigative powers they had to focus on the origins of the [counterintelligence operation](#) into the Trump campaign that preceded Mueller's appointment as special counsel. As such, he said, Senate Republicans, who are in the majority, would be wise to call in former Obama administration officials along with ex-FBI director James Comey to testify. Mueller, Gingrich said, would be a "dead end."

"I think Mueller is smart enough that he would not hence be a helpful witness. And I don't think it leads you to anything," said Gingrich. "Mueller is a door to nowhere because nothing you will learn will matter."

If Republicans were to try to force Mueller to testify, it would have to be in the Senate, where the party still has power over committee schedules. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the chair of the Judiciary Committee, had [previously offered](#) Mueller the opportunity to testify but has since stated emphatically that he believes the matter is closed.

Asked Wednesday if the senator's position had softened at all, Graham's spokesman, Kevin Bishop, pointed to Mueller's request not to come to the Hill. Asked if the senator would consider a subpoena, Bishop noted that doing so would go "against [Mueller's] wishes."

The more likely venue for Mueller to be compelled to testify remains in the House, where Democrats have been attempting to negotiate a hearing for weeks. But those talks stalled, first after the Department of Justice wouldn't agree to a date and then when Mueller privately conveyed his fears that any testimony would become a political circus. Leadership has since toyed with the idea of subpoenaing Mueller and hinted that they may well do so despite his request not to testify.

House Republicans have been divided over having Mueller testify. Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA), the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, released a statement on Wednesday effectively conceding that Mueller wouldn't come to the Hill. But the mood on Thursday appeared to be changing. Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) confirmed to The Daily Beast that he wanted Mueller to be questioned before Congress. And a senior GOP aide said other members had begun warming up to the idea of putting the now-former special counsel under oath.

"I think the sense is people are miffed by the way Mueller handled the situation from the time he released the report: the fact he didn't come to a prosecutorial decision and that he is not taking questions," said the aide. "My sense is some members do want to get more from him in that regard."