

DID THE MOST SENIOR WHITE HOUSE OFFICIAL LIE TO THE NYT ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE COMEY FIRING LETTER?

One week after conducting a “surprise” interview set up by Trump ally Christopher Ruddy (for which he was widely criticized), Mike Schmidt has a widely hailed story describing the evidence supporting an obstruction charges against Donald Trump.

Or maybe against Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Most interestingly, it suggests that several days after Trump attacked Jeff Sessions while watching Jim Comey’s May 3 testimony to Congress, Sessions sent an aide to Congress to try to gin up a series of damning stories about Comey.

White House aides gave updates to Mr. Trump throughout, informing him of Mr. Comey’s refusal to publicly clear him. Mr. Trump unloaded on Mr. Sessions, who was at the White House that day. He criticized him for recusing himself from the Russia investigation, questioned his loyalty, and said he wanted to get rid of Mr. Comey.

[snip]

Two days after Mr. Comey’s testimony, an aide to Mr. Sessions approached a Capitol Hill staff member asking whether the staffer had any derogatory information about the F.B.I. director. The attorney general wanted one negative article a day in the news media about Mr. Comey, according to a person with knowledge of the meeting.

A Justice Department spokeswoman said

the incident did not occur. "This did not happen and would not happen," said the spokeswoman, Sarah Isgur Flores. "Plain and simple."

Hmmm. I don't think Sessions has honored his recusal.

He may have also ordered up Rod Rosenstein to suggest Comey needed firing.

Earlier that day, Rod J. Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, had pulled one of Mr. McGahn's deputies aside after a meeting at the Justice Department. Mr. Rosenstein told the aide that top White House and Justice Department lawyers needed to discuss Mr. Comey's future. It is unclear whether this conversation was related to the effort to dig up dirt on Mr. Comey.

The following weekend, Trump went to Bedminster to have Stephen Miller write up a letter firing Comey. It's this detail I'm most interested in.

In interviews with The Times, **White House officials have said the letter contained no references to Russia or the F.B.I.'s investigation.** According to two people who have read it, however, the letter's first sentence said the Russia investigation had been "fabricated and politically motivated." [my emphasis]

Remember, Schmidt has just had a rather celebrated interview with one particular White House official. Er, The White House Official. Half of the off-the-record comments omitted from the NYT transcript of the interview clearly pertain to the Russian investigation.

TRUMP: Everybody knows the answer already. There was no collusion. None whatsoever.

TRUMP: Maybe I'll just say a little bit of a [inaudible]. I've always found Paul Manafort to be a very nice man. And I found him to be an honorable person. Paul only worked for me for a few months. Paul worked for Ronald Reagan. His firm worked for John McCain, worked for Bob Dole, worked for many Republicans for far longer than he worked for me. And you're talking about what Paul was many years ago before I ever heard of him. He worked for me for – what was it, three and a half months?

[snip]

TRUMP: What I've done is, I have absolute right to do what I want to do with the Justice Department. But for purposes of hopefully thinking I'm going to be treated fairly, I've stayed uninvolved with this particular matter.

TRUMP: For purposes of the Justice Department, I watched Alan Dershowitz the other day, who by the way, says I, says this is a ridiculous –

SCHMIDT: He's been very good to you.

TRUMP: He's been amazing. And he's a liberal Democrat. I don't know him. He's a liberal Democrat. I watched Alan Dershowitz the other day, he said, No. 1, there is no collusion, No. 2, collusion is not a crime, but even if it was a crime, there was no collusion. And he said that very strongly. He said there was no collusion. And he has studied this thing very closely. I've seen him a number of times. There is no collusion, and even if there was, it's not a crime. But there's no collusion. I don't even say [inaudible]. I don't even go that far.

TRUMP: So for the purposes of what's going on with this phony Russian deal, which, by the way, you've heard me say it, is only an excuse for losing an election that they should have won, because it's very hard for a Republican to win the Electoral College. O.K.?

This last break in the transcript picks up right where the information these White House officials lying to the NYT leave off: with the claim that this is a "fabricated and politically motivated" investigation.

Particularly given that Schmidt has been working this aspect of the story for months, what are the chances that the most senior White House official lied to Schmidt about what he had written to justify firing Jim Comey?