

WAS CHRIS RUDDY A SECOND BACK CHANNEL BETWEEN MANAFORT AND TRUMP?

Yesterday, BuzzFeed released the next tranche of FOIAed Mueller 302s. There's actually some interesting details. They show:

- Details of how KT McFarland lied and then, when she realized Mueller had obtained Transition emails, cleaned up her story in a panic
- Some but not all of Jerome Corsi's 302s, which are actually fairly informative
- Some but not all of Manafort's 302s where he lied (one of which I'll return to)
- Manafort's admission he used Sean Hannity as a go-between with Trump

It also includes Chris Ruddy's 302 (starting at PDF 58). As DOJ has been doing with most 302s, they've left mostly stuff that showed up in the Mueller Report unredacted, hiding the rest under deliberative (b5) exemptions.

But I'm interested in Ruddy's 302 because four paragraphs that show a b7ABC redaction, which mostly has been used to hide stuff pertaining to Roger Stone.

	b5 Per DOJ/OI
	b6 b7A b7B per DOJ/OI b7C
	b5 Per DOJ/OI
	b6 b7A b7B per DOJ/OI b7C

I doubt this redaction pertains to Stone, though, at least not exclusively.

As I noted last June when Amy Berman Jackson liberated the Sean Hannity texts with Manafort, she withheld another set of communications (probably showing Kevin Downing reached out to the media, as he had done with Hannity, which is why they were submitted as part of Manafort's sentencing). She withheld the other texts because of an ongoing proceeding.

At the time, I suggested that the other proceeding might pertain to Chris Ruddy because:

- Ruddy was a key source for a key Howard Fineman story in the same time frame as Kevin Downing had reached out to Hannity
- Prosecutors probably obtained all of Manafort's WhatsApp texts after learning he had been witness tampering using that account
- Ruddy testified to Mueller the day after they had extracted the Manafort-Hannity texts, suggesting he was a likely candidate to be the other person whose texts showed ongoing communication

with the media

Here's my logic from that post:

All that provides one possible explanation for why Manafort decided it'd be a good idea to put his lawyer directly in touch with Hannity, in violation of her gag order. But that doesn't explain the other reason ABJ decided not to release the second set of texts: some "ongoing matters" that require the communications remain secret.

[snip]

There's one other notable date in that time period. As I've noted, the Downing – Hannity discussions came just before Howard Fineman reported, on January 30, 2018, not only that Trump planned to beat Mueller by having Sessions investigate him...

Instead, as is now becoming plain, the Trump strategy is to discredit the investigation and the FBI without officially removing the leadership. Trump is even talking to friends about the possibility of asking Attorney General Jeff Sessions to consider prosecuting Mueller and his team.

... But also reported that Trump was confident that Manafort would not flip on him.

He's decided that a key witness in the Russia probe, Paul Manafort, isn't going to "flip" and sell him out, friends and aides say.

Chris Ruddy was one source for the Fineman story. And Ruddy was interviewed by the FBI about his knowledge of Trump's efforts to obstruct justice on June 6, 2018, the day after

the FBI extracted the Hannity texts from Manafort's phone.

On Monday, June 12, 2017, Christopher Ruddy, the chief executive of Newsmax Media and a longtime friend of the President's, met at the White House with Priebus and Bannon.⁵⁴⁷ Ruddy recalled that they told him the President was strongly considering firing the Special Counsel and that he would do so precipitously, without vetting the decision through Administration officials.⁵⁴⁸ Ruddy asked Priebus if Ruddy could talk publicly about the discussion they had about the Special Counsel, and Priebus said he could.⁵⁴⁹ Priebus told Ruddy he hoped another blow up like the one that followed the termination of Corney did not happen.⁵⁵⁰ Later that day, Ruddy stated in a televised interview that the President was "considering perhaps terminating the Special Counsel" based on purported conflicts of interest.⁵⁵¹ Ruddy later told another news outlet that "Trump is definitely considering" terminating the Special Counsel and "it's not something that's being dismissed."⁵⁵² Ruddy's comments led to extensive coverage in the media that the President was considering firing the Special Counsel.⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁷ Ruddy 6/6/18 302, at 5.

⁵⁴⁸ Ruddy 6/6/18 302, at 5-6.

⁵⁴⁹ Ruddy 6/6/18 302, at 6.

⁵⁵⁰ Ruddy 6/6/18 302, at 6.

⁵⁵¹ Trump Confidant Christopher Ruddy says Mueller has "real conflicts" as special counsel, PBS (June 12, 2017); Michael D. Shear &

Maggie Haberman, Friend Says Trump
Is Considering Firing Mueller as
Special Counsel, New York Times
(June 12, 2017).

If you're going to contact one of
Trump's close media allies – Hannity –
to send Trump an ultimatum about
Manafort and get the media person on
board for a plan to undercut Mueller,
you're likely to contact Trump's other
closest media ally, Chris Ruddy.

None of that answers what Downing had to
explain to Hannity and what the ongoing
proceeding might be. But it does suggest
that Ruddy was in the same kind of
discussion circle in January 2018 as
Hannity was.

The four paragraphs in Ruddy's 302 that, nine
months after Mueller finished remain redacted
because of an ongoing investigation, suggest my
speculation was probably right, and that the
ongoing proceeding pertains to communications
between either Manafort or Downing back before
Howard Fineman reported that Trump had
confidence that the one witness who might hurt
him, Manafort, would not flip on him.

I'm not sure what ongoing proceeding that would
entail. And if Manafort was also using Ruddy as
a back channel to Trump, it would mean his later
testimony was false, because he didn't also
admit to using Ruddy in that fashion.