

**LEV PARNAS, RUDY GIULIANI ASSOCIATE, IS INTERVIEWED ON MSNBC'S
"THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW"**

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SPEAKERS:

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RACHEL MADDOW, MSNBC HOST: Last night, on the eve of the impeachment articles against President Trump being conveyed from the House to the Senate for the start of the Senate trial that will decide whether or not President Trump is removed from office, last night, the committees that conducted the impeachment investigation added a bonus round to the materials that they planned to convey to the Senate.

Alongside the articles of impeachment, they added new evidence. These newly obtained documents and text messages from a man named Lev Parnas. Lev Parnas is a Soviet-born, Russian-speaking U.S. citizen who worked closely with President Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, on the scheme in Ukraine, for which the president has now been impeached.

The scheme to pressure Ukraine into announcing investigations of Vice President Joe Biden, and the concurrent use of U.S. military aid and visits with U.S. government officials, and other things that the Ukrainian government desperately wanted basically as cudgels to try -- try to force them into announcing those investigations about Biden.

Well, now, tonight, as the articles of impeachment have been walked over to the Senate by the impeachment managers, actually basically right as that was happening, the impeachment committees in the House, simultaneously to this moment, released some additional phone records from Mr. Parnas, which have revealed yet further information about who was involved in this scheme and how it worked.

Well, today in New York City, I met with Lev Parnas, and with his lawyer Joseph Bondy. And so, tonight, we're going to present this exclusive interview.

Mr. Parnas has never before spoken in a televised interview. He has not spoken to reporters at all since his name surfaced in conjunction with a scandal and since he was arrested on October 9th, with a one-way ticket out of the country at Dulles Airport. He was charged with federal felony counts for funneling illegal donations to Republican candidates and campaigns.

Now, Mr. Parnas is under indictment. He's awaiting trial in the Southern District of New York. He has pled not guilty.

He agreed to speak with me today on the condition that his lawyer, Joseph Bondy, would be seated alongside him throughout the interview. That's a condition that I agreed to.

To be honest, because I agreed to that condition, I fully expected that it would be Mr. Bondy, the lawyer, who did most of the talking in this interview, but it did not work out that way.

Mr. Parnas, as you will see here, is absolutely here to speak for himself, and he is more than capable of doing so. He and his attorney have made clear in recent days and weeks that Lev Parnas really does want to testify to the impeachment investigation.

That said, I can't stress enough that he right now is out on bond awaiting trial in federal court on serious felony charges. So, the decision for him to do this interview with me today is very unusual. People in that circumstance, in terms of federal felony charges, don't typically do media interviews, but they agreed to sit down with me today, and we did it. Let's get right to it.

I will tell you just in advance, to set the stage, that in this interview, you will hear Lev Parnas make some bombshell assertions about the involvement and knowledge of President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence in the Ukraine scandal. He will make a specific allegation about the president's unique role in holding up the U.S. aid to Ukraine as an additional lever of pressure against the Ukrainian government.

You will also hear fairly explicit allegations by Mr. Parnas about Attorney General William Barr. He also makes some allegations about several other members of the cabinet. We'll talk about some of those tonight, and we're saving some to talk about tomorrow so we can do some additional reporting around them.

But on top of all of that, as Mr. Parnas, you'll see, makes clear, right off the bat, right at the top of our interview, he knows that in addition to all of the things he's telling you tonight and that have been revealed in these documents, in conjunction with the impeachment investigation, in addition to all of that, he says he still has yet more to share.

All right. Here with go.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Mr. Parnas, Mr. Bondy, thank you both for agreeing to do this. I know that this is a leap of trust to speak publicly in this way for the first time. Thanks to both of you for agreeing to do it.

JOSEPH BONDY, ATTORNEY: Thank you.

LEV PARNAS, RUDY GIULIANI ASSOCIATE: Thanks for having us here.

MADDOW: Lev, let me ask you first, Lev, did you know that these materials that you had handed over to the Intelligence Committee were going to be released publicly last night? It's landed with quite a splash. It's very provocative material.

Were you aware that it was going to be made public?

PARNAS: No, I didn't. It was -- yes, it was an incredible day. I mean, it was a godsend that we were able to -- with Joe's help and being able to get that in time, because we didn't think we're going to make it because we stayed up until I think 2:00 in the morning transferring over stuff to the House that night.

MADDOW: And what was the deadline in terms of the time pressure?

PARNAS: I mean, Joe --

BONDY: The deadline was trying to get these things to HPSCI, the Intelligence Committee, before the transmission of the articles of impeachment.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

BONDY: As with the articles go -- goes the record, and we had reason to believe certain pieces of what we were turning over would be put into the public record. We just weren't sure when that would be, and we had no idea what it would be.

MADDOW: Let me ask you in terms of what we have seen and what they released publicly. Not everything was released publicly. Some was held back, but in terms of what we have seen publicly, is it all look authentic to you? Does any of it seem to be doctored? Does it -- is it all what you were expecting to see in terms of what you handed over?

PARNAS: Yes.

BONDY: Absolutely.

MADDOW: Are you still putting together more information to give to Congress, or do you essentially feel that the deadline has passed now that this information is going to the Senate?

BONDY: No, we're going to continue making productions, as we get materials from Southern District and anything that we can possibly continue to find on our own, through the cloud or whatever it may be.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

BONDY: We're going to continue to provide things until we're told not to.

MADDOW: Lev, why do you want to testify to the impeachment investigation?

PARNAS: I want to get the truth out because I feel it's important for our country. I think it's important for me. I think it's important for the world to know exactly what transpired and what happened, because I think a lot -- there's a lot of things that are being said that are not accurate. And I just want to make sure that they're accurate because things happened that need to get out, and I think the world needs to know.

MADDOW: What do you think is the main inaccuracy or main lie that's being told that you feel like you can correct?

PARNAS: That the president didn't know what was going on. President Trump knew exactly what was going on. He was aware of all my movements. He -- I wouldn't do anything without the consent of Rudy Giuliani or the president.

I have no intent, I have no reason to speak to any of these officials. I mean, they have no reason to speak to me.

Why would President Zelensky's inner circle or Minister Avakov -- or all these people, or President Poroshenko meet with me? Who am I?

They were told to meet with me. And that's the secret that they were trying to keep. I was on the ground doing their work.

MADDOW: In terms of the president and what he has said about you, he said about you and Mr. Fruman, Igor Fruman: I don't know those gentlemen. I don't know about them. I don't know what they do.

You're saying that was not a true statement from the president?

PARNAS: He lied. I mean, we're not friends. I mean, when you say friends, I mean, me and him didn't watch football games together, we didn't eat hotdogs. But he know exactly who we were. He know exactly who I was especially because I interacted with him at a lot of events.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: I had a lot of one-on-one conversations with him at gatherings or they have (ph) special like these roundtables, where there are only six people at the table. We have several of those.

And basically, I mean, I was with Rudy more than -- I mean, four or five days out of the week. I mean, I was in constant contact with him. So -- and I was with Rudy when he would speak to the president, plenty of times. I mean, so it's just ludicrous.

MADDOW: You've been with Mr. Giuliani when he was on the phone with the president?

PARNAS: Absolutely.

MADDOW: And how would you know that he was on the phone with the president? It would be on speakerphone? Or you would just hear him?

PARNAS: Well, several times, it would be on speakerphone, where he would like start the conversation on speakerphone and then take it off, and then go somewhere else to talk to him.

But a lot of times, it would be on the golf course when we were golfing together -- especially I remember during the Mueller times where Rudy I remember said something that he didn't appreciate -- was taking out of context and he was creaming at him so loud. That's when I watched the impeachment and I saw the testimony about the Sondland (ph), that I reiterate (ph) - I could understand that you could hear President Trump talking next to -- like I heard him several times when he was with Rudy.

MADDOW: Because he speaks loudly on the phone?

PARNAS: Very loudly, yes.

MADDOW: When you say that the president knew about your movements and knew what you were doing, are you saying specifically -- and I want to sort of drill down on that -- that the president was aware you and Mr. Giuliani were working on this effort in Ukraine to basically try to hurt Joe Biden's political career? He was -- he knew about that?

PARNAS: Basically. Yes, it was all about Joe Biden, Hunter Biden, and, also, Rudy had a personal thing with the Manafort stuff, the black ledger.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: And that was another thing they were looking into, but it was never about corruption. It was never -- it was strictly about Burisma, which included Hunter Biden and Joe

Biden.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: It's all about the Bidens. It was never about corruption. Strictly about Joe Biden, Hunter Biden.

In terms of the involvement of the president here, Mr. Parnas went out of his way to note, to assert, that not only was President Trump aware of what he and Mr. Giuliani were doing on his behalf in Ukraine, trying to gin up this investigation to hurt Joe Biden, Mr. Parnas says that the fact that he was working for President Trump is a point that was made explicitly over and over again in a very formal way, in his dealings in his meetings in Ukraine.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Your attorney told the federal court in New York that you were both Rudy Giuliani's clients and you were working for Mr. Giuliani in his capacity as personal attorney to the president.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Which, by the transitive property, makes it seem like you were working for the president of the United States as part of this legal defense.

PARNAS: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

MADDOW: And so, did anybody in the U.S. government or Mr. Giuliani actually conveyed to officials in Ukraine that you were there as a representative of President Trump?

PARNAS: Absolutely. To each one of those officials, that -- you know, the -- I put Rudy on the phone with Mr. Avakov, Minister Avakov several times, Ivan Bakanov, Yuri Lutsenko at the time was the attorney -- general.

The first thing I did is to introduce myself and tell them, I'm here on behalf of Rudy Giuliani and the president of the United States, and I'd like to put you on speakerphone for he'd know (ph) to confirm them, which we did. We put Rudy on the phone. Rudy relayed to him basically that we were there on behalf of the president of the United States.

MADDOW: That you were there to speak on President Trump's behalf.

PARNAS: Correct, exactly, those exact records.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Mr. Parnas says that when he was taking meetings to advance this scheme, taking meetings with various government officials in Ukraine, he says it was a regular occurrence, it was the way those meetings started.

He would put Rudy Giuliani on phone, on the speakerphone in the room, and he would say explicitly, Mr. Giuliani would say explicitly that as the president's personal attorney, he could affirm that Lev Parnas was there at that meeting in Ukraine to speak on behalf of the president of the United States, Donald Trump.

In May of last year, May 2019, Mr. Giuliani started speaking with reporters about his plans to travel himself to Ukraine to try to enlist the Ukrainian government's assistance to help his client, President Trump, basically in his reelection effort. He said he was going to Ukraine to try to get them to announce investigations into Vice President Biden, because that would be very helpful to his client.

In the resulting firestorm of criticism, Mr. Giuliani's trip was called off in May. When he called off the trip, Mr. Giuliani made public statements criticizing the new government of Ukraine, saying that Ukraine's new president was surrounded by enemies of the United States.

And for Ukraine, that was a really big deal, right? Ukraine is at war with Russia, is a country very dependent on both of the reality and the perception of them having strong support from the United States government.

And so, when Mr. Giuliani, as the president's personal attorney, started making public claims that the new Ukrainian president was surrounded by enemies of the United States of America, that's why he wasn't going to Ukraine, at that point, the Ukrainian government kind of freaked out, right? That kind of criticism from the new U.S. administration for their new president in Ukraine, that's a potential death sentence for their country.

So, at the time that happened, Lev Parnas was in Ukraine, he was in Kiev at the time all that happened, and he told me today that he was tasked by Rudy Giuliani in that moment to crank up the pressure on the government of Ukraine, to make even more insistent and obvious, and even more onerous, this threat and this demand that Ukraine must announce investigations into Joe Biden or else.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Did you meet with the Ukrainian official Sergey Shaffer (ph)?

PARNAS: Yes, I did.

MADDOW: Sergey Shaffer is a very senior aide to President Zelensky.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: It has been reported as far as we understand, from public reporting, that you conveyed to Mr. Shaffer the exact quid pro quo, that you wanted Zelensky to announce investigations into Joe Biden or military aid would not be released to Ukraine. Is that accurate?

PARNAS: It was a little bit more than that. Basically, the message that I was supposed -- that I gave Sergey Shaffer was a very harsh message. I was told to give it to him in a very harsh way, not in a pleasant way.

MADDOW: Who told you to give it to him a harsh way?

PARNAS: Mayor Giuliani, Rudy, told me after, you know, meeting with the president at the White House. He called me. The message was, it wasn't just military aid, it was all aid. Basically their relationships would be sour, that he would -- that we would stop giving them any kind of aid that --

MADDOW: Unless?

PARNAS: -- unless that there was announcement made -- it was several things. There were several demands at that point. A, the most important was the announcement of the Biden investigation.

MADDOW: Did you also convey to him that the U.S. government would stop showing support for Mr. Zelensky, that they wouldn't attend the inauguration? Or that --

PARNAS: That was -- that was the biggest thing, actually. That was -- that was the main -- it wasn't -- because at that time, you have to understand the way Ukraine is.

For President Zelensky, winning on that platform, being a young president, and not really having any experience, the number one thing -- and being at war with Russia at the time, the number one thing was not even aid, and I know it sounds crazy, but it was more support from the president.

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: By having a White House visit, by having a big inauguration, by having all the dignitaries there. That was the key.

At that time, they were already aware because of their conversations with the -- I guess with the embassy that -- Vice President Pence was supposed to come to the inauguration. It was already discussed. And they were planning it out. They were just working on days that would be

good for him.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: At our meeting, I was very, very stern. It was a heated conversation from our part to him, basically telling him what needs to be done. I mean, basically me.

And at the -- at -- in the conversation, I told him that if he doesn't -- the announcement was the key at that time because of the inauguration, that Pence would not show up. Nobody would show up to his inauguration.

MADDOW: Unless he announced an investigation into Joe Biden, no U.S. officials, particularly Vice President Pence would not come --

(CROSSTALK)

PARNAS: Particularly Vice President Mike Pence.

MADDOW: So, the day after that meeting that you had with Mr. Shaffer --

PARNAS: This was Sunday, Sunday the 12th.

MADDOW: I believe it was the following day that, in fact, Vice President Pence's visit to the inauguration was canceled.

PARNAS: It was after my phone call. The conversation I laid out to Mr. Shaffer was basically what I was told to do by Giuliani and the president. And then, afterwards, I relayed back to them saying that he's going to get back to me later that tonight and we're supposed to meet.

Then around 8:00, or 9:00 at night, I texted them back again saying, any word? What's the situation? And at that point, because on WhatsApp when a person like disconnects you, and he disconnected me, our conversation, he basically was --

(CROSSTALK)

MADDOW: He blocked you?

PARNAS: He blocked me. I understood that was a no. So, I called back and said no-go, and he -- I remember Rudy going, OK, they'll see.

Basically, the next day, Pence, to my awareness, Trump called up and said, to make sure Pence doesn't go there.

So --

MADDOW: So, you believe that Mr. Pence's trip to the inauguration was canceled because they didn't agree --

PARNAS: Oh, I know, 100 percent.

MADDOW: -- to announce an investigation into the Bidens?

PARNAS: Oh, because there's other -- the chain of events, that was key to where we are today, because after that, what left -- take a look at what transpires.

Next, within the next couple of days, all of a sudden, they realize that now they get word, because obviously, when Pence cancels, they get word that Pence is not coming. So, now, they realize that what I -- what I was telling them is true.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Now they realize when I was threatening them on behalf of the White House, that if they didn't announce the Biden investigation, that Vice President Pence wouldn't come to the inauguration, they realize now when Pence, in fact, canceled his inauguration when I said he would, they knew I was legit. That's essentially what he's saying.

I love the line there that he quotes Mr. Giuliani saying, OK, they'll see. Like they'll see what they get for telling you no, when you demanded those investigations, they'll see.

And in fact, Vice President Pence does cancel his trip to the inauguration within 24 hours.

But for Mr. Parnas, that was a key moment for him in terms of being able to continue to work on this effort in Ukraine with credibility, because Mike Pence cancelling his trip to the inauguration was a validating moment. It made clear to the government of Ukraine at the highest level, this is a senior aide to the new president, this made clear to them at the highest levels that Lev Parnas was legitimately representing the president of the United States and the White House in this shakedown.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: So Vice President Mike Pence has his planned trip to the inauguration canceled after you were unable to get the Ukrainian government to commit to announcing investigations into Vice President Biden.

Do you know if Vice President Pence was aware that was the quid pro quo, that that was the trade, and that that in fact is why his inaugural visit was called off?

PARNAS: I'm going to use a famous quote by Mr. Sondland, everybody was in the loop.

MADDOW: You believe that Vice President Pence knew what he was -- knew that his trip to the inauguration was contingent on those investigations being announced?

PARNAS: Again, I mean, I know he went to Poland also to discuss this on Trump's behalf. So, he couldn't have not known, absolutely.

MADDOW: Let me -- let me ask you about it. So, that's -- after the inauguration, September 1st, Vice President Pence goes to Poland and actually takes a meeting with President Zelensky of Ukraine.

One of the unusual revelations we've had since the impeachment investigations was a Defense Department e-mail that was made public through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, that Defense Department emails from the chief of staff to the defense secretary. He tells someone else at the Pentagon, don't worry about it, this Ukraine aid -- I'm paraphrasing -- this Ukraine aid problem is all going to be sorted as soon as Vice President Pence meets President Zelensky in Poland on September 1st. That should clear this up.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Do you understand why a Defense Department, somebody working in the secretary of defense's office might have believed that about that meeting?

PARNAS: Oh, I understand what was going on. So, it makes sense to me because what was transpiring was every time, like I said to you, at every meeting, either Giuliani or I would have, or somebody from the Trump's government would have with the Ukrainians, they would always agree that they were going to make some sort of -- that they were on board, that they're going to make an announcement, and then they would walk it back.

So, after certain instances, Trump was supposed to meet him -- President Trump was supposed to meet Zelensky in Poland himself. But then he used the excuse of the hurricane, but it wasn't because of the hurricane. It was because he was angry that Zelensky still didn't make any attempt or effort to make any announcement before he was going to meet him and he wasn't --

MADDOW: How do you know that was an excuse and that wasn't the real reason?

PARNAS: Because I spoke to Rudy. Rudy would talk to me to -- I mean, we spoke about this every day. I mean, everything that was going on was discussed between me, Victoria, Rudy, I mean, the team.

MADDOW: So, President -- President Trump is supposed to go, he decides not to go. Vice

President Pence will go instead --

(CROSSTALK)

PARNAS: He sends them instead, yes, and basically he was supposed to go there and get it straightened out that Zelensky was supposed to make another announcement. And that didn't happen.

That's when Bolton, Secretary Bolton, went over there. And I think he has a lot to say.

I'm not going to talk on this (ph) -- but I think he's a key witness to his conversation with Zelensky, and when he came back and why he left, or got fired, or however you want to look at that.

MADDOW: Let me make sure I understand what you're saying. When Vice President Pence went over there in September 1st, again in President Trump's stead, you believe -- you have reason to believe that Vice President Pence was tasked at that meeting with getting President Zelensky to announce investigation of Joe Biden specifically?

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: And to tell him that they wouldn't get their aid until they --

PARNAS: I don't know exactly what he was -- but it was all --

(CROSSTALK)

MADDOW: To demand an investigation.

PARNAS: Like I said, the aid itself was something that I think the president decided to do -- what's it called? But it was I think a reaction that there was no announcement being made after so many attempts and so many promises.

MADDOW: So, holding the aid was the president's own sort of innovation to add to the leverage --

PARNAS: I think so.

MADDOW: -- to add to the pressure that people like you, and the vice president, and Mr. Giuliani --

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: -- and everybody else involved in this effort was putting on Ukrainians.

PARNAS: Correct, correct.

MADDOW: When you say that Mr. Bolton may have something to say about this, did Mr. Bolton know that Vice President Pence was supposed to secure that agreement from Zelensky, that he'd announce these investigations?

PARNAS: I don't know exactly what Mr. Bolton know, but I know Mr. Bolton was definitely involved in the loop because of the firing of Maria Yovanovitch. Also, his interactions with Rudy Giuliani. They started butting heads, and he was not agreeing -- I mean, from Venezuela to Ukraine, Bolton didn't agree with Giuliani on the way of dealing with it.

So, there was tension there. There was -- there was definitely tension there.

MADDOW: But you believe he knows what the administration was pressuring Ukraine to do?

PARNAS: Bolton?

MADDOW: Yes.

PARNAS: A hundred percent. He knows what happened there.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Lev Parnas in an exclusive interview with me today in New York City.

We've contacted Vice President Pence's office tonight on this allegation that his visit to the Zelensky inauguration was canceled because Ukrainian official wouldn't announce investigation into Joe Biden. Also, the allegations that Vice President Pence was tasked with getting that commitment about announcing these investigations in his follow-up visit where he did meet with President Zelensky on September 1st in Poland.

We have asked for comment from Mike Pence's office on those matters. We have not heard back. We'll let you know if that changes.

For his part, of course, national security advisor John Bolton has made clear that he would testify to the Senate impeachment trial if subpoenaed to do so. He has made public remarks to the effect that he has relevant information about the impeachment investigation, that he knows things that other people don't know.

In terms of the president and this allegation from Mr. Parnas that the president explicitly authorized Mr. Parnas to act in his behalf in Mr. Parnas' interactions with Ukrainian officials,

that Mr. Giuliani explicitly told Ukrainian officials, that on the authority of the president of the United States, they should listen to Mr. Parnas essentially as a spokesperson for the president, that he was conveying the full authority of the president's legal representation -- this allegation from Mr. Parnas in addition that the president was fully aware of and involved in all his efforts to push Ukraine to announce these investigations -- we have asked the White House for comment on Mr. Parnas' remarks tonight. We have not yet heard back. Again, we will let you know if that changes.

But next, here comes the part about them going after Ambassador Maria Yovanovitch. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: There were notes that were released to the Intelligence Committee that were now released publicly, and I want to -- if you don't mind, I ask you about some of these.

PARNAS: Sure.

MADDOW: Were these notes that you took -- I'll show them to you here, obviously they're on Ritz Carlton Vienna letterhead -- this is your handwriting?

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: Were these notes from a meeting in which other people were present? Or were these your notes taken from a conversation -- a phone conversation that you had with someone else?

PARNAS: This was a phone conversation I was having with Mr. Giuliani, and basically discussing certain things that -- because after that, I would have had a conversation with somebody in the Zelensky team.

I was making notes for myself what was important to get (ph).

MADDOW: And you were from Vienna at the time you were taking these notes?

PARNAS: Correct, correct.

MADDOW: So, this first note -- get Zelensky to announce that the Biden case will be investigated, that's Mr. Giuliani tasking you, that you should get that commitment from Zelensky?

PARNAS: That was always the main objective. Correct.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: That was always the main objective: get them to announce they were investigating Joe Biden. That's Lev Parnas speaking with me today in New York City.

One of the many dark hearts of this impeachment scandal is the virulent, and scurrilous and ultimately successful effort to get the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine fired. Ambassador Maria Yovanovitch.

Lev Parnas told me today a lot about that effort, including at one point, apologizing for it, expressing regret. But he also made crystal clear why Yovanovitch was targeted the way she was.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Do you believe that part of the motivation to get rid of Ambassador Yovanovitch, to her out of post was she was in the way of this effort to get the government of Ukraine to announce investigation of Joe Biden?

PARNAS: That was the only motivation.

MADDOW: That was the only motivation?

PARNAS: There was no other motivation.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: If Ambassador Yovanovitch was, in fact, targeted by Lev Parnas and Rudy Giuliani and President Trump and others involved in this effort to get her out of post, to get her out of way of the bogus Joe Biden effort -- well, our public understanding of that campaign which conducted allegedly for that purpose, our public understanding of that campaign against her took a very dark turn last night, when information that Lev Parnas turned over to impeachment investigators revealed menacing text messages from a Republican congressional candidate named Robert Hyde, who happened in these texts to be reporting in to Lev Parnas about surveillance of Ambassador Yovanovitch, asking Lev if he wanted her out and purporting to have a contact inside her security team who could facilitate such a thing.

I asked Lev Parnas about those menacing text messages today. He told me he did not take Robert Hyde seriously, either in general or in relation to those messages. He agreed that the messages were disturbing, but says he never believed Mr. Hyde's assertions about this purported surveillance nor did he believe that Ambassador Yovanovitch was actually in danger.

Watch.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: Who is Robert Hyde?

PARNAS: He's a -- he's just -- I don't know how to explain him. He's --

MADDOW: You can say whatever you mean, I can bleep you if you need to swear.

PARNAS: He's a weird character. He's a weird individual.

MADDOW: You met him where?

PARNAS: I met at the -- I think at the Trump Hotel. Yes, at the Trump Hotel. He was a regular at the bar.

MADDOW: So we now have your text messages with Mr. Hyde that get into some dark territory when it comes to Ambassador Yovanovitch.

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: Why did -- at least from the string of text messages that we've seen, it seems that is sort of starts, at least what we've got you texting him what appears to be anti-Yovanovitch information.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: Why were you sending him that text (ph)?

PARNAS: I saw the text, they did not go to the beginning of our texts. This was just some of the WhatsApp stuff, which is very little.

But Robert Hyde was like -- I don't want say, hang -- is somebody who would hang around, because he did know like all these -- he didn't know the president, and he didn't know Rudy Giuliani, but he did know like McCarthy, he know Roger Stone, he know like all these -- I mean -- because it was like a breeding ground at the Trump Hotel.

So, every event, we'll be there, so everybody would hang out there afterwards, everybody, while the meetings would be there. So, basically, you would see the same people every day, all the same congressmen that supported the president would be there, nobody else.

So he was a fixture on sight. He was always there, but he was always drunk.

MADDOW: You struck up enough of relationship with him to be texting with him.

PARNAS: Well, yes, it was more of -- Igor had more relation with him. Igor -- he just couldn't speak with Igor, so he would text him because they were like -- usually after we were done for the night, you know, the bar scene was happening, and I don't drink, but -- so they would hang out, have a drink at the bar.

MADDOW: Let me ask, I mean, the -- the text messages that he sends to you --

PARNAS: Yes.

MADDOW: -- about Ambassador Yovanovitch are disturbing.

PARNAS: Very dark (ph).

MADDOW: What is the context of these text exchanges? He appears to be giving you specific information about the ambassador's movement, about her location, about her security situation, calls her the B-word over and over again, very hostile to her and seems to be monitoring her whereabouts.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: What -- why did those exchanges happen? What was he trying to tell you?

PARNAS: Well, I don't believe it's true. I think he was either drunk or he was trying to make himself bigger than he was, so I didn't take it seriously, and I was trying to -- if you see, I didn't respond most of the time. If I did, it was something look, LOL, OK or great, or, you know, something like that, just to -- because I wouldn't respond for a long time, and I didn't want him to get rowdy if I saw him the next time, why didn't you text?

I would just amuse him until eventually as you could see, I cut him off because what happened is when he sent me those, I got disturbed. I was, like, oh, this is crazy. Like, is this guy off the wall?

So I called up I think it was Joe Ahern (ph), who was my contact at the super PAC America First --

MADDOW: OK.

PARNAS: -- that knew of him also, because he knew all the donors.

And I asked him, I said, well, is this guy off the loonies? He told me, stay away from him, because he's just got into something with Greg Pence, Mike Pence's brother, and thinking that the Secret Service is after him, and somebody wants to kill him.

And I don't know what happened, but that was my end of -- once he started texting me that, that was the end of our relationship.

MADDOW: But the texts where he was supposedly reporting on the whereabouts of the ambassador went on for a week. I mean, it wasn't like one drunken night.

PARNAS: Of course.

MADDOW: This went for seven days. He couldn't have been drunk the whole time.

PARNAS: He was drunk the whole time. He wakes up and he's drunk -- he starts at 6:00 -- I mean, I've never seen him not drunk.

MADDOW: So you thought this was him making it up. You didn't believe he actually had the ambassador under surveillance?

PARNAS: Absolutely not.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

MADDOW: I asked Mr. Parnas several times over the course of our interview if those text messages from Robert Hyde indicated a real threat to Ambassador Yovanovitch. I asked him about it with as many different angles I could come up with, I was insistent in asking, he was adamant in his response.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: So, it's clear that you didn't take Mr. Hyde seriously in terms of the factual (ph) claims that he was making. But are you clear on whether or not there was ever as an actual physical threat or a threat of personal intimidation against Ambassador Yovanovitch?

PARNAS: Never from my side or anybody I know.

MADDOW: You didn't worry that she was actually in physical danger.

PARNAS: No, never, never.

MADDOW: Because you didn't believe Mr. Hyde.

PARNAS: No, I didn't believe Mr. Hyde, no.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: We contacted attorneys for Ambassador Yovanovitch tonight to let them know about these statements from Mr. Parnas, about this possible threat to their client. They are not commenting tonight, but we've got more ahead, including what ends up being a very difficult conversation about the attorney general of the United States, William Barr.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Did Rudy Giuliani tell you he had spoken to the attorney general specifically about Ukraine?

PARNAS: Not only Rudy Giuliani. I mean, Victoria and Joe, they were all best friends. I mean, Barr was -- Attorney General Barr was basically on the team.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Small point of personal privilege. One of weird things for me over the past few moments is that right at the time the House announced impeachment proceedings against President Trump, I right then, that week, was publishing a book called "Blowout" about the oil and gas industry. And in the book, I used the story that I thought was an interesting sidebar up story about a natural gas tycoon named Dmytro Firtash. I used him in my book as the vehicle to tell one story about Russia was deliberately corrupting countries like Ukraine that they want to keep in their orbit and they were using energy to do so.

And then as the book was coming out, none other than Dmytro Firtash was revealed to be one of the forces at work in this corruption scheme in Ukraine to try to smear Vice President Joe Biden and fire the U.S. ambassador, and withhold U.S. aid to that country and hurt them in their fight against Russia and the whole thing.

It was just -- it was uncanny, it was totally unintentional on my part. It was like a little bit of an -- like academic news world car crash.

But now, today, the Dmytro Firtash factor has at least become a little less mysterious. Dmytro Firtash, like Lev Parnas, the man who interviewed today, is under federal indictment. Mr. Firtash's case is under indictment on multiple serious felony corruption charges. He's fighting extradition to the United States. He's currently under house arrest in Vienna.

Federal prosecutors in the Firtash case have called him an upper echelon associate of Russian

organized crime.

The reason I say this got a little less mysterious today is that in my interview with Lev Parnas this afternoon in New York City, he spelled out basically what this oligarch, Dmytro Firtash, was doing in the middle of this impeachment scandal, with Rudy Giuliani and the Fox News friendly attorneys, Victoria Toensing and Joe diGenova, and how it all ultimately brings us to the desk of the attorney general of the United States, William Barr.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PARNAS: So, at some point we had a meeting at our -- in our BLT office on the second floor.

MADDOW: At the Trump hotel?

PARNAS: At the Trump hotel.

At that meeting with Rudy and Victoria and Joe, John brought up saying he had some incredible information from Firtash camp, which later we found out it was I think Lenny Davis gave it to him, but that it was -- basically what showed that Andrew Weissmann was doing some legal stuff, and offering a deal, and it could blow up the smaller investigation up the kazoo.

MADDOW: Can I stop you there for a second?

So, the allegation, as you understood it, was that Andrew Weissmann, one of the prosecutors working on the Mueller team, had made -- had had an interaction with Dmytro Firtash, who's under indictment by the Justice Department, who's fighting extradition here, and that interaction Mr. Solomon (ph) was saying would be something scandalous that would discredit the Mueller investigation.

PARNAS: Correct. So, we were tasked basically with trying to establish a relationship and --

MADDOW: Specifically to get information to try to discredit the Mueller investigation.

PARNAS: Absolutely, yes. And basically, we went to -- I was given certain documents by John Solomon that would validate to Dmytro Firtash that I was in the loop and that I knew what was going on, because Mr. Firtash is a gentleman that just doesn't see anybody, and that's -- you know, it's impossible to even to get to meet with him.

For us to be able to receive information from Firtash, we had to promise Firtash something.

MADDOW: Uh-huh.

PARNAS: So, for Firtash, it was basically telling him we knew his case is worthless here and

that he's being prosecuted for no reason and that basically it could get taken care of. That --

MADDOW: That was your offer to Mr. Firtash.

PARNAS: Correct, correct.

MADDOW: That we can get this prosecution of you dropped.

PARNAS: Your extradition case, correct, yes.

So, that was basically the situation at that point.

MADDOW: So the exchange with Mr. Firtash was going to be, you provide us information that would be detrimental to the public perception of the Mueller investigation, and we in turn will get your case dropped at the DOJ, so you won't get extradited to the United States anymore?

PARNAS: That's how it began.

MADDOW: Mr. DiGenova and Ms. Toensing were going to become lawyers to effectuate this trade?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: And you were supposed to broker this?

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: And what's this \$100,000 a month?

PARNAS: That was expenses for them, because --

MADDOW: That's what you were supposed to negotiate that this is what they were getting paid?

PARNAS: Yes, correct.

MADDOW: Are you getting paid in these interactions?

PARNAS: Mine is not this there. That was -- they were getting a million dollars plus \$100,000 a month on expenses. Mine was \$200,000.

MADDOW: And what is this here? What's that next line? Is that the founder of Burisma?

PARNAS: Zlochevsky is a Ukraine -- and the Ukraine ledger (ph), yes. Zlochevsky and Burisma and (INAUDIBLE) --

MADDOW: What are you supposed to be getting from about Burisma and the Ukrainian ledger from Lanny Davis and Mr. Firtash?

PARNAS: Well, supposedly, John Solomon said there was stuff (ph), there's case about that.

MADDOW: Aha. So, that's why this was all one conversation with Mr. Rudy Giuliani.

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: The -- announcing the Biden investigation and talking about getting Firtash off from this Department of Justice prosecution, these were connected?

PARNAS: It was all connected. I mean, it was all -- at the end of the day, it was all -- the agenda was to make sure that the Ukrainians announced the Biden investigation.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: So, a conservative journalist, John Solomon, and two Fox News lawyers, Joe diGenova and Victoria Toensing, and Rudy Giuliani and Lev Parnas are all involved, in Mr. Parnas telling, in an effort to enlist the help of a billionaire, Kremlin-connected, allegedly mobbed up oligarch, to help them pressure the Ukrainian government that they must announce investigations of Joe Biden.

And the oligarch and his team tells this motley crew that he can help with that, with getting that from the Ukrainian government. He can also help them discredit the Mueller investigation.

They say, that would be great. What we have to offer you in exchange is we can help stop you from being extradited to the United States to face felony corruption charges from the U.S. Department of Justice.

"The Washington Post" just this afternoon records that Mr. Giuliani's involved with Mr. Firtash, and Mr. Firtash's sort of team, appears to be an ongoing concern that appears to be live.

Lev Parnas said today that his group's advocacy to get the case dropped against Mr. Firtash did go all the way to Attorney General William Barr, and he says that Attorney General Barr was more widely read in on what they were doing.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Did you ever meet with or speak with or have any interaction with Attorney

General William Barr?

PARNAS: I personally did not speak to him, but I was involved in lots of conversations that Joe diGenova had with him in front of me, Rudy had with him in front of me, and setting up meetings with Dmytro Firtash's team. I was involved in that.

MADDOW: Do you know if Rudy Giuliani was ever in contact with Mr. Barr, specifically about the fact that he was trying to get Ukraine to announce these investigations into Joe Biden?

PARNAS: Oh, absolutely.

MADDOW: Mr. Barr knew about it?

PARNAS: Mr. Barr had to have known everything. I mean, it's impossible.

MADDOW: Did Rudy Giuliani tell you he had spoken to the attorney general specifically about Ukraine?

PARNAS: Not only Rudy Giuliani. I mean, Victoria and Joe, they were all best friends. I mean, Barr -- Barr was -- Attorney General Barr was basically on the team.

MADDOW: When President Trump and President Zelensky spoke in July, we know from their White House notes of the call, that President Trump told Mr. Zelensky that he should contact William Barr about these investigations --

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: -- that he wanted him to do, including into Joe Biden --

PARNAS: Correct.

MADDOW: -- that struck a lot of people as strange. Attorney General Barr was reportedly upset, and didn't know why he would be mentioned in this context, but it sounds like it makes sense to you that --

PARNAS: Absolutely, because we knew about the Durham investigation, and that was going to be part -- I mean, that Attorney General Barr wanted to get to the bottom of the Biden stuff and everything. I think he might have got upset that Trump talked -- the president ousted him, maybe, he didn't want to be in the public eye (ph) that he was doing it, but it was known internally that he was investigating the investigators.

MADDOW: Do you know if Attorney General William Barr ever spoke with any Ukrainian officials?

PARNAS: I don't recall at this moment. I'd have to look at my text messages and see.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: We contacted the Justice Department for comment on Mr. Parnas' remarks tonight. Spokeswoman Kerri Kupec at the Justice Department did give us a response. It is a two-word response -- I guess technically one number and one word.

She told us, quote, 100 percent false. And we could attribute that to her. We appreciate the comment.

We'll be right back. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: Today, the impeachment articles were conveyed from the U.S. House to the U.S. Senate. Senate trial is due to formally start tomorrow. One of the awkward revelations in this saga is that while the Intelligence Committee in the House was leading the investigation of the impeachment scandal, it emerged that the top Republican member of Congress on that committee, Congressman Devin Nunes of California, appeared himself to have been connected to the people involved in the scandal and potentially to the scandal itself.

Because Congressman Nunes has been publicly very vague and defensive about whether he remembers any of his own communications with Lev Parnas during the time this Ukraine scheme was underway, I asked Mr. Parnas today if he remembers any interactions with Congressman Nunes.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Do you know Congressman Devin Nunes?

PARNAS: Yes, I do.

MADDOW: What's been your relationship with him?

PARNAS: We don't have too much of a relationship. We met several times at the Trump hotel, but our relationship started getting basically where it expanded was when I was introduced to his aide, Derek Harvey, and the reason why Derek Harvey was more -- I understood, I was told at that time because Devin Nunes had an ethics, something to do with an ethics committee, and he couldn't be in a spotlight. He was kind of shunned a little bit and that he was looking into this Ukraine stuff also, wanted to help out. And Devin Nunes -- they gave me Derek Harvey to deal with.

MADDOW: You told Mr. Harvey what you and Mr. Giuliani were working on in Ukraine, trying to get Ukraine to announce this investigation?

PARNAS: He was aware of that already. He knew everything.

MADDOW: He already knew that by the time he talked to you.

PARNAS: He had a lot of information already.

MADDOW: Do you believe he'd gotten that information from Mr. Giuliani?

PARNAS: No. I think that they -- like I said, there was other people doing like this op research or whatever.

MADDOW: Oppo research.

PARNAS: I don't know what you call it, but it was coming from different sides, yeah.

MADDOW: Given that interaction that you just described with Congressman Nunes and his aide, Mr. Harvey, does it strike you as unusual or inappropriate that Devin Nunes would be one of the lead investigators into this scandal on the House Intelligence Committee? He's obviously the top Republican on that committee?

PARNAS: I was in shock when I was watching the hearings and when I saw Devin Nunes sitting up there, and then there was a picture where Derek Harvey was in back over there sitting. I texted my attorney I said I can't believe this is happening.

MADDOW: Because?

PARNAS: Because they were involved in getting all this stuff on Biden. I mean, Derek Harvey had several interviews -- Skype interviews I set up with different prosecutors like Haladitsky (ph), which the anti-corruption prosecutor of Ukraine, Kostiantyn Kulyk was one of the major guys that's had this whole Biden stuff.

So, it's hard to see them lie like that when you know it's like that scary because you know, he was sitting there and making all these statements and all that when he knew very well that he knew what was going on. He knew what's happening. He knows who I am.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Again, Congressman Devin Nunes is the top Republican on the Intelligence Committee, which is the committee that investigated the Ukraine scandal. Lev Parnas says that

Mr. Nunes and his top staffer were actually involved in the Ukraine scandal in the sense that they were involved in the effort to try to gin up a corruption scandal for Joe Biden in Ukraine. Mr. Parnas says he helped them in that effort.

We contacted Congressman Nunes's office for comment tonight. We did not receive any reply before air time. We'll let you know if that changes before we're off the air. More ahead, stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: You raised the issue of Ambassador Yovanovitch to President Trump telling him that he should get rid of her?

PARNAS: Yes, well, I didn't say get rid of her. I don't know my exact words (INAUDIBLE) but I told him she's bad mouthing him and she's saying bad things about him.

MADDOW: Do you actually believe that she did bad-mouth him and say bad things about him, or do you think this was part of this disinformation campaign to make her look bad?

PARNAS: I don't believe it. That's why I want to apologize to her because, you know, at that point I believed it, but I don't believe it now after re-evaluating and seeing everything that transpired, looking at the documentation again.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: I did not expect that Lev Parnas wanted to use this interview today to apologize to Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch for his role in the effort to smear her and get her fired, but he did that.

The broader context Mr. Parnas was just talking about there is what he says was a personal interaction he had with President Trump in which he says he witnessed president Trump personally ordering the firing of Marie Yovanovitch. We will have more on that in part two of the Lev Parnas interview tomorrow night.

We'll also have more for you tomorrow night on what Mr. Parnas alleged about -- alleged today about former Energy Secretary Rick Perry and current Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. We're doing a little more reporting on those allegations and claims. We're looking, in fact, at some of the new information that bolsters Mr. Parnas's case which was just released tonight by the Intelligence Committee.

So again, more on that tomorrow in part two of this interview. I do just before I go want to

bring you some news we just got moments ago while we have been on the air tonight in the past couple of minutes, we got a response from former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani to something Mr. Parnas told us in today's interview.

You saw Mr. Parnas say on the air that Giuliani had made introductions for him with Ukraine officials in which he told the Ukrainian officials that Mr. Parnas spoke as a representative of President Trump. Mr. Giuliani denied to us that he ever did that. Asked whether Mr. Parnas was speaking on behalf of the president in Ukraine, Mayor Giuliani told us tonight, quote, never. He also called Mr. Parnas a, quote, sad situation.

This was one big day. Tomorrow will be another.

END