

Comey lambastes GOP over Trump's attacks on FBI

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Former FBI director James Comey on Monday accused President Donald Trump of trying “to burn down the entire FBI” and charged that congressional Republicans were willing accomplices for failing to challenge him.

“The FBI’s reputation has taken a big hit because the president with his acolytes has lied about it constantly,” Comey told reporters, following his second closed-door interview this month with House lawmakers running a politically divisive investigation into how federal law enforcement officials handled probes of the Trump campaign’s alleged Russia ties and Hillary Clinton’s emails.

But Comey directed his vitriol not just at the GOP members of the House Judiciary and Oversight and Government Reform committees, but at all Republicans — including retiring GOP lawmakers, such as Sens. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), and Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), who have openly criticized Trump but aren’t seeking re-election.

“At some point someone has to stand up and face the fear of Fox News, fear of their base, fear of mean tweets, stand up for the values of this country and not slink away into retirement but stand up and speak the truth,” Comey said, without naming names.

Comey testified for nearly six hours Monday, in addition to the six-hour closed-door discussion he had with panel members earlier this month.

During that session, he defended his decisions as FBI director — such as superseding then-Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch to declare the Clinton probe closed and then informing congressional leaders days before the 2016 election that it had been reopened.

Comey reiterated that defense even more strongly Monday, flatly refusing to take any personal responsibility for the reputation of the FBI having suffered under his stewardship. He instead blamed Trump for “lying about the FBI, attacking the FBI and attacking the rule of law in this country,” and the “silence from people in this building” — meaning Capitol Hill — for allowing him to do it.



Former FBI Director James Comey on Monday

“Republicans used to understand that the actions of a president matter, the words of a president matter, the rule of law matter and the truth matters,” he said. “Where are those Republicans today?”

Republicans on the panel have been in open conflict with Comey about whether he was appropriately forthcoming with his answers, and whether his testimony contradicted former statements he has made.

According to a transcript of the first round of proceedings, Comey declined to answer several questions pertaining to the FBI’s probe of Trump, arguing that the details he was being asked to provide were too closely tied to special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation of the Trump campaign’s suspected ties to Russia.

Comey also declined to say whether Trump, in firing him last year, had attempted to obstruct justice, although an FBI lawyer present at the interview appeared to confirm that the special counsel was looking into such matters.

Republican lawmakers asked Comey about former national security adviser Michael Flynn’s FBI interview, suggesting his rights were violated because he was rushed into doing it without access to White House counsel. They were making those arguments as charges against Flynn’s former business associates were being unveiled as part of a federal probe into secret lobbying by Turkey to pressure the United States to extradite a Turkish cleric.

Comey would not say what he knew of the FBI’s investigation into Flynn’s associates, but he defended the interrogation of Flynn as “extremely consistent” with bureau guidelines.

Bill would cut nonunion Nassau workers' payouts

BY SCOTT EIDLER

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The Nassau County legislature passed a bill Monday drastically cutting payouts for leftover sick and vacation time given to nonunion county employees when they leave government service.

Under the bill, nonunion employees hired on or after March 1, 2019, would be paid for up to 30 accumulated vacation days and 30 unused sick days after they leave.

Under current county law, nonunion workers hired after Aug. 15, 2014, can be paid for a maximum of 75 vacation days and 175 sick days upon termination. Employees hired before that date can cash out 90 unused vacation days and 200 unused sick days.

Legis. Denise Ford, a Long Beach Democrat who caucuses with Republicans, proposed an earlier version of Monday’s bill in August after a Newsday report found Nassau had paid more than \$2.5 million in unused vacation and sick time to 75 political appointees who exited county government after the election of Democratic County Executive Laura Curran in November 2017.

Curran’s election brought significant turnover to county government after the eight-year administration of Republican Edward Mangano. Seven of the employees got more than \$100,000 each, according to county records.

“It’s a little bit too much for the residents to bear,” Ford said in an interview. “A lot of people do not get these types of buyouts.”

Disclosure of the payouts prompted discussion about the county’s time-off policies, with some legislators wondering why exempt employees had not taken more sick leave and vacation time over their tenures in county government. The new bill would allow employees to accrue more vacation time earlier in their first year.

“When we are giving benefits of having sick and vacation time, it’s for the benefit and the welfare of the employee. We want to urge the employees to take their time,” Ford said Monday. “By eliminating the amount that they can retire with, hopefully they will realize that they should use the time before they lose it.”

Ford said the policies would result in “saving substantial taxpayer dollars.”

Nassau’s finances are precarious. The Nassau Interim Finance

Authority, its financial control board, projected in October that Nassau could face a \$70 million deficit this year, and a \$59 million one next year.

The legislation also would let newer employees accrue more vacation time earlier in the year. Employees hired on or after March 1, 2019, would be credited with 5 vacation days after about 6 months, and an additional 5 days after one year.

Under the current policy, employees hired on or after Aug. 15, 2014, were only given two vacation days after the first half year, and three days at the end of the year.

Ford said that she gives “credit to anybody who agreed to work for us, with only getting two days vacation in their first year of employment. So we’re trying to even things out.”

After one year, employees start accruing half of a vacation day per pay period, which occurs every two weeks. “For us we’re saying that if you get the time, take it,” Ford said. “You have an opportunity to take vacation time. If you’re sick, don’t come to work when you’re sick. You get paid to stay home and get better.”

Legis. Siela Bynoe (D-Westbury) said she supported the legislation, but wanted more revisions, including a provision requiring employees take five consecutive vacation days.

“Occasional vacations fail to offset the stresses of the work environment,” Bynoe wrote in a September memo in support of a mandatory consecutive leave policy.

Ford said she would be open to considering further changes down the road.

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