

New York grand jury convened to hear evidence of Trump business crimes

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The Manhattan district attorney has convened a special grand jury as part of a long-term investigation into former president Donald Trump's business operations, which are headquartered in New York City. The move, reported in the press on Tuesday night, is said to indicate that criminal charges could be brought against officials of the Trump Organization, including Trump himself, within the six-month life of the grand jury.

The investigation, overseen by District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., is coordinated with a state probe run by New York State Attorney General Letitia James, which has focused on potential charges of tax evasion against the former president.

Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published prominent reports on the convening of the grand jury, which outlined possible charges against Trump. These reportedly could involve both his conduct of the business and financial operations of the Trump Organization and his personal finances, including illegal payoffs during the 2016 election campaign to women who claimed to have had sexual affairs with him. Both newspapers said that the summoning of a grand jury meant that charges were likely to be filed within the next six months.

The Manhattan district attorney's investigation began in the wake of revelations by Trump's former personal attorney and long-time bagman and fixer, Michael Cohen, who served a three-year prison term for his activities and is now a cooperating witness. It was Cohen who reportedly delivered the hush money to the two women, pornographic actress Stormy Daniels and former *Playboy* magazine centerfold Karen McDougal.

The state investigation, overseen by the attorney general, also began in response to revelations by Cohen, in this case his testimony before Congress in

2019, where he described Trump's manipulation of real estate values, inflating them in applications for bank loans while minimizing them when filing tax returns.

The *Post* reported, "The move indicates that District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr.'s investigation of the former president and his business has reached an advanced stage after more than two years. It suggests, too, that Vance thinks he has found evidence of a crime—if not by Trump, by someone potentially close to him or by his company."

Both the president's son Eric, a top official of the Trump Organization, and the company's longtime top financial officer, Alan Weisselberg, have given sworn testimony to the Vance investigation.

The potential charges include the manipulation of the valuation of various real estate properties "in a way that defrauded banks and insurance companies, and if any tax benefits were obtained illegally through unscrupulous asset valuation," the *Post* said.

The Vance investigation has long been one of the main dangers to the Trump family, whose fortune has been based on New York City real estate, where virtually every deal by every big investor involves a large element of fraud—certainly in relation to tax evasion.

In that sense, the decision to go after Trump is certainly rooted in political calculations, including disqualifying Trump as a potential candidate in 2024, as Democratic Party prosecutors at the local and state level single out Trump for what "everybody does" in the American ruling elite.

That said, there is no doubt that Trump is a gangster guilty of countless crimes, before and especially during his presidency. His impending prosecution would resemble that of mobster Al Capone, who perpetrated or ordered hundreds of murders, but ultimately went to

prison for tax evasion.

Earlier this week, James announced that her office was now initiating a criminal probe based on its investigation of civil infractions by the Trump Organization and coordinating this with the criminal probe run out of Vance's office. The two investigations were said to be focusing on the valuation of a 212-acre Trump estate in the New York City suburbs, Seven Springs in Westchester County, where Trump obtained a \$21 million tax break.

Trump issued a statement denouncing the now-joint state and local investigation as "a continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in American history... driven by highly partisan Democrat prosecutors."

If anything, however, the most evident feature of the twin probes is their slowness. The Democrats hesitated to bring any charges against a sitting president, deferring to the Trump Justice Department's finding that no criminal charges could be brought against a US president while in office—essentially a declaration that the president was above the law.

Even now, with New York state and local prosecutors considering charging Trump with tax and accounting crimes, the Biden administration has gone to court in support of the position taken by the Trump Justice Department in relation to the Mueller investigation, the two-year-long probe of baseless claims that the 2016 Trump presidential campaign was coordinated with the Russian government of President Vladimir Putin.

Trump's attorney general, William Barr, fought a protracted legal battle to keep secret a memo from his own Office of Legal Counsel advising him on how to handle the public release of Mueller's findings. Congressional Democrats sued to obtain the memo, suggesting that Barr had disregarded his own office's legal advice when he wrote a cover letter declaring that Mueller had cleared Trump of any wrongdoing, when Mueller's findings were more equivocal.

Biden's Justice Department, under Attorney General Merrick Garland, announced Monday it would appeal a judge's order to release the internal memo, citing the same grounds—the necessity to protect internal deliberations within the executive branch.

The right-wing *Wall Street Journal* gloated in an editorial, "As the appeals court considers what to do, the Biden and Trump administrations are now on the same page."

District Court Judge Amy Berman Jackson, who has read the internal memo, declared that Barr was being "disingenuous" in his description of Mueller's findings and that the Justice Department had deceived the court about the role of the memo in the decision-making process.

"The review of the document reveals that the Attorney General was not then engaged in making a decision about whether the President should be charged with obstruction of justice; the fact that he would not be prosecuted was a given," she wrote.

Trump faces still another legal proceeding, this one involving a civil suit brought by Democratic Representative Eric Swalwell over Trump's speech on January 6, 2021 to the crowd that then marched on the Capitol, stormed the building, and temporarily blocked the certification of his defeat in the Electoral College.

Trump's attorney Jesse Binall argued Tuesday in a pleading filed with the federal district court for the District of Columbia that the speech was protected under the First Amendment and that Trump had "absolute immunity" while in office as president to contest the election results.



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