

Republicans demand special counsel as Biden aides turn over second batch of classified documents

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Aides and attorneys for President Joe Biden discovered a second group of classified documents retained in a private office after his terms as vice president, and have turned them over to the National Archives, it was reported Wednesday.

The report fueled further demands from congressional Republicans for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate Biden, similar to the special counsel chosen by Attorney General Merrick Garland to investigate the apparently illegal retention of hundreds of classified documents by former president Donald Trump.

The differences between the two cases outweigh the similarities, given that the number of documents is much smaller, Biden claims to have been unaware of them, and they were turned over to the National Archives voluntarily. Trump initially refused to turn over the documents in his possession, and his legal representative in the affair lied to the FBI, claiming that all the documents had been returned when more than 100 were still stored at Trump's estate at Mar-a-Lago.

But the Biden documents have become another weapon in the political warfare in Washington, which has escalated enormously with the takeover of the House of Representatives by the Republican Party, which holds a narrow majority of 222 to 212, the same margin that the Democrats held during the first two years of Biden's term.

The White House said that the documents had been found packed in boxes in a locked closet in Biden's former office at a University of Pennsylvania facility in Washington D.C., where Biden was a visiting professor for three years, 2017-2020, after he ended his two terms as vice president and before he announced his bid for the Democratic nomination for president.

Wall Street Journal editorial cited a report that some of the documents had the highest possible classification, "sensitive compartmented information," most press reports claim that the Justice Department is reviewing the documents after they were turned over by the National Archives, and that the classification level has not yet been revealed.

Speaking at the North American Leaders Summit in Mexico City, Biden said he was "surprised to learn" that classified documents had been found at his former office, and that he did not know what they were.

He said aides were closing up that office last November and found the documents, and immediately notified the White House counsel's office, which turned them over to the National Archives the following day. "They did what they should have done," he said. "They immediately called the Archives."

Trump, of course, weighed in on social media with his usual barrage of lies and exaggerations, claiming that Biden should have received the same treatment from the FBI and the Justice Department as he had confronted last year. "When is the FBI going to raid the many homes of Joe Biden, perhaps even the White House?" he asked.

Attorney General Merrick Garland immediately announced that he had named the US Attorney for Chicago, John Lausch, a Trump appointee, to take charge of the investigation into the Biden documents. According to press reports, Lausch will be interviewing many former Biden aides, some of whom are now prominent officials in the administration, about whether they had knowledge of the documents or access to them during the time Biden was a private citizen.

That did not satisfy Trump and his supporters, who

demanded the appointment of a special prosecutor, like Jack Smith, chosen to conduct investigations of Trump in two areas: his retention of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, and his role in the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol, carried out by a mob of his supporters at his instigation.

Representative Mike Turner, chair of the House Intelligence Committee, asked for the US intelligence agencies to conduct a “damage assessment” of the documents found at the Biden office. The members of the Intelligence Committee, for both parties, are selected by the Speaker, and Republican Speaker Kevin McCarthy said he would bar the former Democratic chairman, Adam Schiff, as well as another Democratic member, Eric Swallwell, from continuing on the committee.

Representative Steve Scalise told the media at his first press conference as House majority leader that they should pursue the issue of Biden’s holding on to classified documents. “For years when Vice President Biden left office, it looks like he took classified documents with him and he was very critical of President Trump,” Scalise said.

Representative James Comer (Republican), who heads the Committee on Government Oversight, filed a request with the National Archives for an accounting of all its actions on the Biden documents, including communications between the archives, White House aides and Department of Justice officials. His letter suggested that he was concerned about a possible “political bias” at the archives.

Democratic Senator Mark Warner, who chairs the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, chipped in with a request for a briefing on the Biden documents.

Representative Jim Jordan, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, said that the Biden administration withheld information about the discovery of the documents until after the midterm elections. Jordan also heads a select subcommittee on the “Weaponization of the Federal Government,” established Tuesday in a party-line 221-211 vote to investigate the investigations into Trump and other top Republicans.

In addition to the select subcommittee, the House voted to establish another special investigative committee, which has overwhelming bipartisan support. By a vote of 365-65, with unanimous

Republican support (219-0) and the backing of better than two-thirds of Democrats (146-65), the House established a new panel to investigate China’s “economic, technological and security progress, and its competition with the United States.”

This is effectively a committee to prepare a case for economic and ultimately military warfare against China, with a purview that includes China’s role in the supply chain for critical US goods, US aid to Taiwan, and supposed Chinese influence on universities and governmental institutions in the United States.

In the rules package adopted on Monday, the Republican majority redirected the existing committee on the origins of coronavirus to take up claims that China deliberately manufactured SARS-CoV-2 and the role of US officials like Dr. Anthony Fauci in approving joint research efforts with the Wuhan lab that supposedly contributed to the pandemic. This a full-fledged witch-hunt based on conspiracy theories peddled by anti-communist Chinese exile groups and fascist aides to Trump like Steve Bannon.



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