

Top Justice Department official meets for 9 hours with Epstein accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell

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Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche met for nine hours over a two-day period Thursday and Friday with convicted sex offender Ghislaine Maxwell, partner and longtime accomplice of sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. The prolonged discussions are the latest sign of the extreme political crisis now facing the Trump White House over the reemergence of the Epstein scandal, six years after Epstein's supposed suicide in a Manhattan jail cell.

The Blanche-Maxwell meeting was highly unusual, both from a legal and a political standpoint. As the top deputy to Attorney General Pam Bondi, Blanche is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the Department of Justice, a vast agency with more than 100,000 employees. For him to devote two full working days to traveling to Tallahassee, Florida, and interviewing a prisoner serving a 20-year jail sentence for sexual exploitation of children is extraordinary.

Blanche had no known familiarity with the Epstein affair prior to being appointed by Trump to his current position but nonetheless met Maxwell and her attorney without any other Justice Department lawyer present, including career personnel who had worked on Maxwell's prosecution. Blanche and Maxwell's attorney, David Markus, are on friendly terms, with Blanche having appeared on a podcast hosted by Markus in June 2024 to discuss his role as Trump's top defense attorney in the Stormy Daniels hush money case.

According to Markus, Blanche came prepared with a barrage of questions, relating to at least 100 named individuals, asking Maxwell "every possible thing you could imagine—everything." Markus said his client responded fully to every question. Blanche had nothing

to say about the content of the protracted meeting, declaring only that the department "will share additional information about what we learned at the appropriate time."

All indications are that Trump, acting through Blanche, is seeking to gather as much dirt as possible on prominent Democrats and Wall Street figures, who socialized or did business with Epstein during the two decades in which he built a fortune as a financial adviser to billionaires like Les Wexner, founder of The Limited clothing chain. The goal would be to offset the political impact of Trump's own name appearing in the Justice Department investigative files on Epstein, of which Trump learned in May from Bondi and Blanche.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported last week about Trump being named in the Epstein files, and about the "heads up" given by Bondi and Blanche, well before the Justice Department issued a brief statement on July 7 declaring that there was nothing more to reveal about the Epstein case, that Epstein's death had been a suicide, and that the matter was closed.

This declaration touched off a firestorm among a section of Trump's supporters, particularly fascist social media figures like Steve Bannon, Alex Jones and Tucker Carlson, who had been hyping the Epstein case as proof of a vast Democratic Party-run network of pedophiles. Trump's standing among his ultra-right followers has been damaged, with thousands of hostile responses on his Truth Social network. At the same time, the intervention of the *Journal*, owned by Rupert Murdoch, whose media empire also includes Fox News, reveals significant divisions among his wealthiest backers over Trump's policies on tariffs and the Federal Reserve.

Trump's principal response to the attacks on him over the Epstein scandal has been to issue a series of threats and provocations against leading Democrats and the corporate media. He filed a \$10 billion libel suit against the *Journal* and parent company Dow Jones. At his urging, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard filed a criminal referral against former President Barack Obama and other leading Democrats, claiming they had attempted a "coup" against Trump after he won the 2016 presidential election by backing claims that the Russian government had leaked unflattering information about Hillary Clinton in the weeks leading up to the vote.

On Friday, as he left to visit his golf courses in Scotland, Trump did not rule out issuing a pardon for Maxwell, claiming, unbelievably, "It's something I haven't thought about," adding, "I'm allowed to do it, but it's something I have not thought about."

Maxwell's lawyer indicated he and his client would seek a pardon from Trump. "We hope he exercises that power in a right and just way," Markus said.

Once in Scotland, Trump could hardly let go of the subject, even in the midst of trade talks with the European Union. On Saturday night, he lashed out at Kamala Harris, Oprah Winfrey and Beyoncé, threatening to prosecute them for supposed campaign finance violations in 2024, while declaring that several of the news networks should have their broadcast licenses revoked for their negative coverage of his administration.

He also has demanded that those raising questions about Epstein and Trump should focus on the actions of former President Bill Clinton and former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers. "You ought to be speaking about Larry Summers. You ought to be speaking about some of his friends that are hedge fund guys," he told reporters. "You ought to be speaking about Bill Clinton."

Meanwhile, Trump biographer Michael Wolff suggested another reason for Trump's extreme sensitivity to the Epstein revelations. He told the *Daily Beast* that Trump had met his current wife Melania through Epstein. "She's introduced by a model agent, both of whom Trump and Epstein are involved with. She's introduced to Trump that way. Epstein [knew] her well," he said.

A further revelation came from the *New York Times*,

which reported that Trump's name appears on a list of contributors for a book celebrating Epstein's 50th birthday. The *Wall Street Journal* had previously reported Trump's contribution, a suggestive drawing and letter to Epstein celebrating their "secrets." The *Times* said that the list of contributors included Trump, Wexner, Alan Greenberg, then CEO of Bear Stearns, one of the investment banks which triggered the 2008 Wall Street crash, and other prominent financiers and politicians.

The Epstein affair has contributed to the further decline in Trump's approval rating, to 37 percent, barely above the 34 percent rating, his lowest ever, which followed the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. This reflects not only the scandal's impact, but more importantly, the mass hostility to Trump's persecution of immigrants, his tariff war on the world, and other attacks on democratic rights and social benefits.

The Democratic Party has not benefited from Trump's decline however, as a *Wall Street Journal* poll published Friday night found that 63 percent of voters had an unfavorable view of the Democrats, the worst showing since 1990. Only 33 percent had a favorable view. The parallel declines of Trump and the Democrats suggest that an increasing portion of the American population correctly views the Democrats not as Trump's opposition but as his partners in crime.



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