

NATIONAL



Manuel Balce Ceneta / AP

FBI Director James Comey, left, and National Security Agency Director Michael Rogers on Capitol Hill in Washington, Monday while testifying before the House Intelligence Committee hearing on allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

FBI probing Trump and Russia links

By Eric Tucker and Eileen Sullivan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The FBI is investigating whether Donald Trump's associates coordinated with Russian officials in an effort to sway the 2016 presidential election, Director James Comey said Monday in an extraordinary public confirmation of a probe the president has refused to acknowledge, dismissed as fake news and blamed on Democrats.

In a bruising five-hour session, the FBI director also knocked down Trump's claim that his predecessor had wiretapped his New York skyscraper, an assertion that has distracted White House officials and frustrated fellow Republicans who acknowledge they've seen no evidence to support it.

The revelation of the investigation of possible collusion with Russians, and the first public confirmation of the wider probe that began last summer, came in a remarkable hearing by one branch of government examining serious allegations against another branch and the new president's election campaign.

Tight-lipped for the most part, Comey refused to offer details on the scope, targets or timeline for the FBI investigation, which could shadow the White House for months, if not years. The director would not say whether the probe has turned up evidence that Trump associates may have schemed with Russians during a campaign marked by email hacking that investigators believe was aimed at helping the Republican defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

"I can promise you," the FBI director vowed, "we will follow the facts wherever they lead."

Comey for the first time put himself publicly at odds with the president by contradicting a series of recent tweets from Trump that asserted his phones had been ordered tapped by President Barack Obama

during the campaign.

"With respect to the president's tweets about alleged wiretapping directed at him by the prior administration, I have no information that supports those tweets, and we have looked carefully inside the FBI," Comey said. The same was true, he added, of the Justice Department.

His confirmation of the Russia-links investigation was striking given the FBI's historic reluctance to discuss its work. But Comey said the intense public interest in the matter — and permission from the Justice Department — made it appropriate to do so.

Comey said the collusion inquiry began last July as part of a broader probe into Russian meddling in American politics, meaning Trump was elected president as associates remained under investigation for possible connections to Russia.

Clinton allies on Monday contrasted Comey's silence during the campaign with public comments he made last year when closing out an investigation into Clinton's email practices and then, shortly before Election Day, announcing that the probe would be revived following the discovery of additional emails. Many Democrats blame Comey's public updates with stoking worries about Clinton's trustworthiness and turning voters against her.

Comey acknowledged that "some folks may want to make comparisons to past instances" where he and other officials were more open, but he said those were about concluded investigations.

In the current case, it's not clear how long it will take for the FBI to decide if a crime was committed, but counterintelligence investigations are known for being complicated and time-intensive — and for frequently concluding without charges. Comey would not commit to a timetable.

Regardless of the outcome, the investigation is unquestionably an unwelcome distraction for the Trump administration.

First daughter Ivanka Trump gets West Wing office

By Catherine Lucey

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Cementing her role as a powerful White House influence, Ivanka Trump is working out of a West Wing office and will get access to classified information, though she is not technically serving as a government employee, according to an attorney for the first daughter.

Since President Donald Trump took office, his eldest daughter has been a visible presence in the White House, where her husband, Jared Kushner, already serves as a senior adviser. On Friday, she participated in a meeting on vocational training with the president and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Jamie Gorelick, an attorney and ethics adviser for Ivanka Trump, said Monday that the first daughter will not have an official title, but will get a West Wing office, government-issued communications devices and security clearance to access classified information. Gorelick said Ivanka Trump would



Andrew Harnik / AP

In this photo taken Friday, Ivanka Trump, the daughter of President Donald Trump, and her husband Jared Kushner, senior adviser to President Donald Trump, attend a joint news conference with the president and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

follow the ethics rules that apply to government employees.

"Our view is that the conservative approach is for Ivanka to voluntarily comply with the rules that would apply if she were a government employee, even though she is not," said Gorelick, who also helped Kushner with the legal strategy that led to his White House appointment. "The White

House Counsel's Office agrees with that approach."

Ivanka Trump's role has already come under scrutiny because there is little precedent for a member of the first family with this kind of influence. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A person with knowledge of Ivanka Trump's

Bake sale lands one in jail

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

An attempt by a Cotulla resident to market narcotics in a bake sale drew the attention of the La Salle County Sheriff's Office on Saturday and resulted in an arrest on drug possession charges.

According to a report on the incident, an anonymous call to the sheriff's office Saturday indicated that a female had posted a message related to marijuana-laced goods on the Facebook social media site.

"My mom is selling weed brownies & weed cookies for \$10," the message read, accompanied by a photo and an invitation to make requests for the baked goods. In a related Facebook message stream, the female who was identified by her social media name and photograph repeated her offer of baked goods containing marijuana but was cautioned by a correspondent to remove the publicly visible advertisement for narcotics.

"Omg (name withheld) delete this lmao, everyone



is going to see," the correspondent wrote in response to the drug offer, "but message me girl."



Courtesy photo

A man was arrested after a person attempted to market narcotics in a bake sale.

La Salle County sheriff's investigator Homar Olivarez said he was alerted to the apparent drug advertisement by concerned citizens and contacted an officer on duty in the Cotulla city patrol to investigate the

case. Deputy Andres Flores was dispatched to a residence in the 500 block of South Baylor Street.

The deputy's inquiries revealed information indicating John Brian Molina had allegedly obtained the baked goods in Pearsall and had brought them to Cotulla to sell.

thinking, who requested anonymity to discuss private conversations, said she believes she can offer more independent perspective to her father by not serving as a White House staffer.

A popular surrogate for her father on the campaign trail, Ivanka Trump moved her young family to Washington at the start of the administration and signaled plans to work on economic issues, like maternity leave and child care. In a statement, she said: "I will continue to offer my father my candid advice and counsel, as I have for my entire life."

Federal anti-nepotism laws prevent relatives from being appointed to government positions. But the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel recently said the president's "special hiring authority" allowed him to appoint Kushner to the West Wing staff. Gorelick noted the office also made clear that the president could consult family members as private citizens, arguing that this is what Ivanka Trump will be doing.

An examination of his home resulted in the discovery of clear plastic bags containing narcotics and other items of drug paraphernalia, including one item bearing residue that tested positive for cocaine, according to the deputy.

Molina was found to be a wanted fugitive with three arrest warrants, including one from Frio County for failing to appear in court on a theft charge. He was arrested on state jail felony charges of possession of marijuana and possession of a controlled substance. He remained behind bars at the La Salle County Jail as of Monday.

"This case was unusual in the manner in which the narcotics were being advertised and made available to potential buyers," the sheriff's investigator said. "All humor aside, we are grateful to the observant and conscientious local residents who exercised good citizenship in notifying us of suspicious behavior such as this."

LPD: Man sexually abused girl

By César G. Rodriguez

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

A man landed behind bars over the weekend for allegedly sexually abusing a girl, according to Laredo police.

Yeshua Loera, 37, was arrested Friday. He was served with warrants charging him with sexual assault of a child, sexual assault, continuous sexual abuse of a child and indecency with a child by contact.

Police began investigat-

ing the case after they responded to a sexual abuse report in north Laredo in January.

An LPD reports states a girl told a counselor that she had been sexually abuse. She stated that Loera was sexually molesting her, according to police.

The child underwent a forensic interview at the Children's Advocacy Center. Afterward, police said they found enough probable cause to arrest Loera.

TAMIU

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the Colonia Guadalupe area.

"The Big Event, first offered at TAMIU in 2010, is our largest student engagement event, involving in excess of 500 student volunteers, all joining hands and hearts to work together and address a pressing community need. We previously partnered with the City on Big Event efforts focused on Slaughter Park, neighborhood cleanup at Eistetter Park and services to Districts II and III," she said.

City of Laredo Community Development Director Arturo Garcia said the collaboration with TAMIU helps provide students with an insightful experience about community needs and more.

"This creates an experience for students to partner with City agencies to assess needs, coordinate services and measure their impact. They gain keen insight into social issues, resources, assets and the importance of awareness of cultural climate when the needs of a dynamic community are addressed," said Garcia.

The MOA also makes

additional engagements and observations possible, Hernández noted.

"TAMIU students may also have opportunities to work closely with City representatives who can provide insightful experiences focused on managing funds, writing grant applications, or providing professional, consultation or facilitation services to a city...all critical elements in the daily life of any growing city," Hernández observed.

TAMIU will work closely with representatives from the City of Laredo's Community Development Department and the Laredo Housing Authority, NeighborWorks Laredo, Great American Cleanup by Keep Laredo Beautiful, among others.

The Community Development Department is charged with providing a better quality of life for the citizens of the City of Laredo particularly persons of low and moderate income by creating housing and economic development opportunities, facilitating public improvements, and promoting a clean, healthy, and safe environment.

The Laredo Housing Authority is dedicated to serving the diverse housing needs of families

within its jurisdiction by increasing the availability of constructive, safe, decent, sanitary and affordable housing in its communities. It also strives to ensure equal opportunity in housing and promote self-sufficiency and asset development of families and individuals. It is also dedicated to improving resident quality of life and economic viability through high-quality client services.

NeighborWorks Laredo's mission is to provide and develop affordable housing opportunities as well as promote and preserve home ownership.

Keep Laredo Beautiful is dedicated to engaging the community, through partnerships between government, civic groups, businesses and volunteers to create a cleaner and more beautiful Laredo. It focuses on environmental stewardship and on litter prevention through environmental education and volunteer efforts.

Elizabeth Alonzo-Villarreal, CEO for NeighborWorks Laredo, said volunteers from NeighborWorks Laredo will also be participating in The Big Event.

"The NeighborWorks network highly promotes community service and

the Big Event is doing just that," Alonzo-Villarreal said.

The Big Event, which began at Texas A&M University in College Station in 1982, has since been adopted by dozens of universities, serving communities across the nation. It has also become a global phenomenon with events in Germany, Italy, Pakistan and Spain, among others.

Hernández said after previous successful Big Event pairings with the City, the University is excited to formally partner with the City of Laredo.

"It's an exciting, historic opportunity. TAMIU students are eager to 'pay it forward' -- to become effective leaders, responsible constituents and serve their community. Many feel it is a shared obligation to give back to a community that has given them so much," Hernández concluded.

TAMIU students' remarkable level of community engagement service, estimated to have generated more than a \$3,274,148.00 in economic impact since 2010, has been recognized twice with the Presidential Honor Roll Award for exemplary community service programs.

LOCAL



Courtesy photo

Local wins first place for lowrider in celebrity car show

Jesus “Chuy” Martinez, founder and president of the Brown Impressions Lowrider Car Club, went to compete at a celebrity car show in Dallas. Martinez won first place for best lowrider. The show was held at Gas Monkey Garage. The facility is the focal point for the Discovery Channel series ‘Fast N’ Loud.’ Richard Rawlings, who launched Gas Monkey Garage, poses in this photo with Martinez’s lowrider. “They sure don’t make them like this anymore,” Martinez quoted Rawlings as saying about his car.

Historic agreement signed

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Texas A&M International University signed a historic memorandum of agreement Monday with the City of Laredo to enable sweeping student-powered community engagement initiatives.

On hand for the ceremony was be Laredo Mayor Pete Sáenz, City Manager Jesus Olivares, Deputy City Manager Cynthia Collazo, TAMIU President Pablo Arenaz, TAMIU Office of Student Conduct and Community Engagement Director Mayra Hernández, City of Laredo Community Development Director Arturo García, Keep Laredo Beautiful Executive Director Lynne Nava and Melissa Ortiz, interim executive director for the Laredo Housing Authority.

Hernández said the MOA with the city enables mutually beneficial collaborations.

“This makes it possible for our students to partner with the City of Laredo in mutually beneficial initiatives that advance



Courtesy / TAMIU

TAMIU President Pablo Arenaz joins Laredo Mayor Pete Saenz for the signing of an historic accord enabling sweeping student engagement initiatives between the City and the University, including this weekend’s The Big Event in the Colonia Guadalupe. Joining are TAMIU students and representatives from the University, the City of Laredo’s Community Development Department, Laredo Housing Authority, NeighborWorks Laredo, Great American Cleanup by Keep Laredo Beautiful, and others.

the City and our students. The end result relevantly strengthens our community engagement initiatives through learning, service and research,” Hernández said.

She noted a significant

example of this has been previous collaborations with the city for the Big Event, an annual TAMIU student engagement event. This year’s the Big Event, scheduled for Saturday, is dedicated to

TAMIU continues on A9



Daily Deals

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‘Unsung Heroes’ announced

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

The Laredo Next Generation Rotary Club has announced the 2017 “Unsung Heroes” honorees.

This year’s recipients include members of the Laredo community who go unrecognized for their extraordinary and unselfish work by putting “service above self,” the club said.

The honorees have been selected for their accomplishments that contribute directly and indirectly to the needs of veterans and all of the Laredo community. The honorees include Ignacio Urrabazo Jr., president and CEO of Commerce Bank-Laredo, Samuel R. Ayala, counseling services coordinator for the 406th District Court, and Gigi Ramos, Volunteers Serving the Need founder and CEO.

The “Unsung Heroes” will be honored March 29 at the Montecarlo Reception Hall, 6415 McPherson Road, at 7:30 p.m.

For more information about sponsorship levels or to reserve a table, contact Rudy Morales at 956-206-5378 or Hector Chapa at 956-206-1505 or visit nextgenerationrotary.com



Ayala



Ramos



Urrabazo

The Laredo Next Generation Rotary is a group of young professionals who have come together to serve the community. The club has built several play-grounds in Laredo including the play-grounds at North Central Park, Dovalina Elementary

and Sacred Heart Children’s Home, in addition to several other small projects the club does to help around the community, such as enhancing local bus stops, ramps for local veterans to name a few.

To learn more about the club, visit its website at nextgenerationrotary.com. The club meets at Hal’s Landing every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.



Join us for a free public forum

Colorectal Cancer:

Prevention, Early Detection and Treatment – Know Your Risks.

GUEST SPEAKERS:

Eduardo Miranda, MD
Hematologist/Oncologist

Reynaldo Godines, MD
Gastroenterologist

Manuel Jovel, MD
Radiation Oncologist

Sunny Wong, MD
Gastroenterologist


Thursday, March 23, 2017
6:00 p.m.

Providence Health Center
230 Calle del Norte Dr.
Laredo, TX 78041

Attendance is free, but registration is required.

Register at
www.doctorshosplaredo.com/seminar

In addition, persons 50 years of age and over who want to be screened may be eligible to take a FREE test kit home. This kit is limited to the first 50 participants who meet the criteria. More details will be provided during the presentation. For more information, call **523-2658**.



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