

Michael Cohen Pleads Guilty

On Thursday, November 29, Michael Cohen, former personal attorney to President Donald Trump, pleaded guilty to lying to Congress about a Moscow real estate project taken on by Trump and his company whilst he was solidifying the 2016 GOP nomination. In a lengthy filing, prosecutors went over a number of lies that Cohen admitted to telling lawmakers in Congress about the Moscow project. Cohen claimed to have lied in an attempt to reduce connections between the proposed development and Trump as his presidential bid gained steam. Cohen said that he deceived lawmakers on behalf of one person listed in court documents as “Individual 1,” later identified by Cohen as Trump. When speaking to the full courtroom in Manhattan, Cohen stated that he “made these misstatements to be consistent with Individual 1’s political messaging and out of loyalty to Individual 1.”

Cohen’s guilty plea is the most recent happening in a long-lasting investigation by special counsel Robert S. Mueller III into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. The Cohen plea is expected to further depress relations between the White House and the Justice Department. As part of the plea, Cohen confessed to lying about endeavours to construct a Trump-branded tower in Moscow ending in January 2016; however, alternative evidence shows that discussions regarding the construction of the tower continued through June of the same year. At this same time during the presidential campaign, Trump was pushing past a well-populated GOP field of candidates to achieve the nomination. According to the filing, Cohen briefed Trump on the project’s status over three times, all on separate occasions. Cohen has stated that the project had initially begun in the fall of 2015, just as Trump’s presidential campaign was kicking off. Cohen had claimed that the project was terminated in January of

2016, pushing him to contact a senior aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin asking for assistance in securing land and financing. Cohen claimed that he never received a reply; however, it was later discovered that the Russians had, in fact, responded, and that Cohen had spent twenty minutes discussing the project on the phone with an assistant to Dmitry Peskov, a top aide to Putin.

Prosecutors made a point to emphasize that Cohen had communicated with Trump about the project multiple times. Prosecutors also stated that Cohen had repeatedly contacted Felix Sater, a Russian-born developer assisting with the project, well into the summer of 2016. In June 2016, Sater invited Cohen to make an appearance at an economic conference in St. Petersburg, promising Cohen that he would be allowed to meet Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, top financial leaders, and even Putin. Sater has reportedly been working with the special counsel investigation for over a year, supplying emails and other documents. According to prosecutors, Cohen delivered a letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee in which he “deliberately” told numerous lies, including that the Moscow project “ended in January 2016 and was not discussed extensively with others in the company”; that Cohen “never agreed to travel to Russia in connection with the Moscow project and ‘never considered’ asking Individual 1 to travel for the project”; and that Cohen “did not recall any Russian government response or contact about the Moscow Project.”

In May 2016, Cohen considered traveling to Russia prior to the Republican National Convention, stating also that Individual 1 (Trump) may travel there after the convention as well. About a month later in the lobby of Trump corporate headquarters, Cohen reportedly met with “Individual 2,” whom was revealed by the court to be Sater. During this meeting, Cohen told

Sater that he would apparently not be making an excursion to Russia after all. The day of this meeting (June 14, 2016) was reported to be the same day that The Post reported that Russian government hackers had stolen data from the Democratic National Committee. Federal sentencing guidelines call for Cohen to face a prison sentence of six months at the most.