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U.S.

Trump Lawyer Arranged \$130,000 Payment for Adult-Film Star's Silence

Agreement just before election required woman to keep quiet about an alleged sexual encounter with Trump in 2006, people familiar with the matter say

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Donald Trump with Stephanie Clifford, whose stage name is Stormy Daniels, in a 2006 photo uploaded to her Myspace.com account.

A lawyer for President Donald Trump arranged a \$130,000 payment to a former adult-film star a month before the 2016 election as part of an agreement that precluded her from publicly discussing an alleged sexual encounter with Mr. Trump, according to people familiar with the matter.

Michael Cohen, who spent nearly a decade as a top attorney at the Trump Organization, arranged payment to the woman, Stephanie Clifford, in October 2016 after her lawyer negotiated the nondisclosure agreement with Mr. Cohen, these people said.

Ms. Clifford, whose stage name is Stormy Daniels, has privately alleged the encounter with Mr. Trump took place after they met at a July 2006 celebrity golf tournament on the shore of Lake Tahoe, these people said. Mr. Trump married Melania Trump in 2005.

Mr. Trump faced other allegations during his campaign of inappropriate behavior with women, and vehemently denied them. In this matter, there is no allegation of a nonconsensual interaction.

“These are old, recycled reports, which were published and strongly denied prior to the election,” a White House official said, responding to the allegation of a sexual encounter involving Mr. Trump and Ms. Clifford. The official declined to respond to questions about an agreement with Ms. Clifford. It isn’t known whether Mr. Trump was aware of any agreement or payment involving her.

In a statement, Mr. Cohen didn’t address the \$130,000 payment but said of the alleged sexual encounter that “President Trump once again vehemently denies any such occurrence as has Ms. Daniels.”



Michael Cohen, Mr. Trump’s personal attorney
PHOTO: JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

Mr. Cohen added in the statement, addressed to The Wall Street Journal: “This is now the second time that you are raising outlandish allegations against my client. You have attempted to perpetuate this false narrative for over a year; a narrative that has been consistently denied by all parties since at least 2011.”

The Journal previously reported that Ms. Clifford, 38 years old, had been in talks with ABC’s “Good Morning America” in the fall of 2016 about an appearance to discuss Mr. Trump, according to people familiar with the matter. In that article, the Journal reported the company that owns the National Enquirer agreed to pay \$150,000 to a former Playboy centerfold model three months before the election for her story of an affair a decade earlier with the Republican presidential nominee, which the tabloid newspaper didn’t publish. The company said she was paid to write fitness columns and appear on magazine covers.

Mr. Cohen also sent a two-paragraph statement by email addressed “TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN” and signed by “Stormy Daniels” denying that she had a “sexual and/or romantic affair” with Mr. Trump.

“Rumors that I have received hush money from Donald Trump are completely false,” the statement said.

Ms. Clifford didn’t respond to multiple emails seeking comment.

After the agreement, Ms. Clifford’s camp complained the payment wasn’t being made quickly enough and threatened to cancel the deal, some of the people familiar with the matter said.

The payment was made to Ms. Clifford through her lawyer in the matter, Keith Davidson, with funds sent to Mr. Davidson’s client-trust account at City National Bank in Los Angeles, according to the people.

“I previously represented Ms. Daniels,” Mr. Davidson said, referring to Ms. Clifford’s stage name. “Attorney-client privilege prohibits me from commenting on my clients’ legal matters.”

A spokeswoman for City National Bank declined to comment.

The agreement with Ms. Clifford came as the Trump campaign confronted allegations from numerous women who described unwanted sexual advances and alleged assaults by Mr. Trump.

In October 2016, the Washington Post published a videotape made, but never aired, by NBC’s “Access Hollywood” in which Mr. Trump spoke of groping women.

Mr. Trump denied all allegations of inappropriate sexual conduct and apologized at the time for his remarks on the tape, calling them locker-room banter.

Mr. Cohen worked at the Trump Organization from 2007 until after the election. As Mr. Trump took office, Mr. Cohen said he would work in private practice and act as Mr. Trump’s personal attorney. “I am the fix-it guy,” he said in an interview in January 2017 before Mr. Trump’s inauguration.

Ms. Clifford has appeared in about 150 adult films, and was considered among the industry's biggest stars when the then-27-year-old met Mr. Trump at the American Century Championship in 2006, held at Edgewood Tahoe golf course in Nevada.

Another adult-film star, Jessica Drake, later alleged in an October 2016 news conference that Mr. Trump kissed her and two other women without permission in a hotel suite after the same 2006 golf event.

"I did not sign [a nondisclosure agreement], nor have I received any money for coming forward," Ms. Drake said this week in an emailed statement. "I spoke out because it was the right thing to do."

A White House official responded to questions about Ms. Drake by referring to a previous statement by the Trump campaign, which called her account "totally false and ridiculous."

—Alexandra Berzon contributed to this article.

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