

The lies are catching up with Trump – a presidency imperiled

By William H. Freivogel

Opinion

False and misleading statements from President Donald Trump and the White House pile up day-by-day, week-by-week, steadily undermining the president's credibility and making him the most unpopular president in modern history at the six-month mark.

Trump claims to have signed more bills than any other modern president. He hasn't.

He blames the Democrats for killing the GOP health bill when it was the Republicans who couldn't muster a majority.

His son first denies ever meeting with Russians about campaign issues, then admits meeting a Russian lawyer but says it wasn't about the campaign, then admits he was promised a Russian government lawyer had dirt on Hillary Clinton, then releases emails expressing delight at the prospect of the dirt, then claims to have told everything about the meeting but leaves out other Russians in attendance.

Trump defends his son's decision to meet with the Russians tweeting, "Most politicians would have gone to a meeting like the one Don jr attended in order to get info on an opponent. That's politics!" But political operatives from both parties say it isn't just politics to collude with agents of America's chief adversary and the proper response would have been to call the FBI.

Trump's lawyers say he is not under criminal investigation even though they have no way of knowing and the claim is difficult to believe. Robert Mueller was appointed special counsel after fired FBI Director James B. Comey disclosed the president asked him to drop the investigation of former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn – an act that is arguably obstruction of justice. And now there are reports Mueller is investigating the Trump Jr. meeting.

All of this lying and misleading is in the last 10 days alone. Before that Trump lied about President Barack Obama tapping Trump tower, about millions of illegal voters for Clinton, and of course there was the big lie that was a cornerstone of his campaign – that Obama wasn't born in the United States.

One might have thought Trump would take a vacation from his refrain about the “dishonest” mainstream media and “fake news” as his son was the source of the documents about the Russia meeting. But there's no stopping this president who tweeted a day later, “Remember, when you hear the words ‘sources say’ from the Fake Media, often times those sources are made up and do not exist.”

And this week, when the media disclosed that Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin had an undisclosed meeting on the side of the G-20 summit – in which Trump spoke to Putin through the Kremlin interpreter – Trump complained bitterly “The Fake News is becoming more and more dishonest!”

Some of conservative commentators finally have lost patience. Last week Fox's Chris Wallace said any fair-minded citizen should worry “about the fact that we were repeatedly misled about what this meeting concerned.” And Fox anchor Shepard Smith told Wallace, “Why is it lie after lie after lie? ... My grandmother used to say ... Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive. The deception, Chris, is mind-boggling.”

Then this week the Wall Street Journal editorial page called for “radical transparency” criticizing the Trumps for having “created the appearance of a conspiracy that on the evidence Don Jr. lacks the wit to concoct. And they handed their opponents another of the swords that by now could arm a Roman legion... Denouncing leaks as ‘fake news’ won’t wash as a counter-strategy beyond the President’s base, as Mr. Trump’s latest 36 percent approval rating shows.” The brutal realities of Washington, the Journal warned, will “destroy Mr. Trump, his family and their business reputation unless they change their strategy toward the Russia probe.”

It is true that a PPP poll shows more than half of Trump’s supporters think Trump Jr. never met with the Russians, even though he admits it. But Trump’s low approval ratings show the lies have had a cost. As Trump’s overall approval rating has slipped, the percentage of strong Trump supporters has declined while the percentage of strong opponents has grown.

It will take months for Mueller to complete his investigation, but it isn’t too soon to say this presidency is imperiled.