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Emails: Trump Jr. embraced help said to be from Kremlin

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Donald Trump Jr. releases Russia emails

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WASHINGTON >> Donald Trump Jr. eagerly accepted help from what was described to him as a Russian government effort to aid his father's campaign with damaging information about Hillary Clinton, according to emails he released publicly today.

[The email exchange posted to Twitter](#) by Donald Trump's eldest son represents the clearest sign to date that members of the president's inner circle were willing to meet during the campaign with Russians who wanted Trump to prevail. U.S. intelligence agencies have said the Russian government meddled in the election through hacking to aid Trump.

The emails show Trump Jr. conversing with a music publicist who wanted him to meet with a lawyer from Moscow. The publicist, Rob Goldstone, describes the lawyer as a "Russian government attorney" who has dirt on Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump." The messages with Goldstone show that Trump Jr. was told that the Russian government had information that could "incriminate" Clinton and her dealings with Russia.

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In one response, Trump Jr. says, "I love it."

Trump Jr., who was deeply involved in his father's presidential campaign, released the emails along with a statement describing the disclosure as an effort "to be totally transparent."

Hours after the emails were released, the president rose to his son's defense.

"My son is a high quality person and I applaud his transparency," Trump said today in a statement read to reporters by White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Although Sanders declined to answer any questions about the emails, she said the White House stood by its insistence that no one in Trump's campaign had colluded to influence the election.

Although Democrats in Congress voiced outrage and insisted the messages showed clear collusion, members of Trump's party did not join in the condemnation. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said he was confident Senate investigators would

“get to the bottom of whatever happened,” while Sen. Susan Collins, a Maine Republican on the intelligence committee, cautioned that the emails were “only part of the picture.”

The messages were the latest disclosure to roil the ongoing investigation into Russia’s interference in the election and potential collusion with Trump’s campaign. As congressional committees and Special Counsel Robert Mueller investigate, the emails will almost certainly be reviewed for any signs of coordination with the Kremlin, which the White House and Trump Jr. have repeatedly denied.

A spokesman for Mueller, the former FBI director, declined to comment, citing the ongoing investigation.

In the emails, dated in early June — soon after Trump secured the Republican nomination — Goldstone wrote to Trump Jr. that the information “would be very useful to your father.”

Goldstone was working to connect Trump Jr. to Russian attorney Natalia Veselnitskaya, who met with Trump Jr. on June 9 at Trump Tower in New York. Veselnitskaya has denied that she ever worked for the Russian government.

“If it’s what you say I love it especially later in the summer,” Trump Jr. replied to Goldstone in one of a series of email exchanges the younger Trump posted to Twitter.

The emails show Goldstone telling Trump that singer Emin Agalarov and his father, Moscow-based developer Aras Agalarov, had “helped along” the Russian government’s support for Trump. The elder Agalarov was involved with Trump in hosting the 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow. The two men also had preliminary discussions about building a Trump Tower in Moscow that fell through. Trump also appeared in a music video with the younger Agalarov.

In his email, Goldstone says that the “Crown prosecutor of Russia” offered to provide the information on Clinton to the Trump campaign in a meeting with Aras Agalarov. There is no such royal title in the Russian Federation, but Goldstone — who is British — may have been referring to the title given to state prosecutors in the United Kingdom.

In Russia, the top justice official is Prosecutor General Yury Chaika, the equivalent of the attorney general in the United States. Chaika is longtime confidant of Vladimir Putin who was directly appointed by the Russian president.

Representatives for the Agalarovs didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment. Attempts to reach Chaika at his office today were unsuccessful.

In one of the emails, Goldstone said he could send the information about Clinton to Trump’s father first directly “via Rhona,” an apparent reference to the elder Trump’s longtime assistant, Rhona Graff, from his days at the helm of the Trump Organization.

In an interview with The Associated Press on Monday, Goldstone described the information as purported evidence of illegal campaign contributions to the Democratic National Committee. It's unclear what proof, if any, Veselnitskaya provided during the meeting.

The email release followed days of evolving accounts from Trump Jr. about the nature of the meeting and its purpose. The president's son posted the emails only after they were obtained by The New York Times.

On Saturday, in his initial description of the encounter, Trump Jr. said it was a "short introductory meeting" focused on the disbanded program that had allowed American adoptions of Russian children. Moscow ended the adoptions in response to Magnitsky Act sanctions created in response to alleged human rights violations in Russia.

A day later, Trump Jr. changed his account, acknowledging that he was told beforehand that Veselnitskaya might have information "helpful" to the Trump campaign, and was told by her during the meeting that she had something about Clinton.

In his most recent description of what occurred, today, Trump Jr. said he had believed the information he would hear about Clinton would be political opposition research.

"The woman, as she has said publicly, was not a government official," Trump Jr. said in the statement today. "And, as we have said, she had no information to provide and wanted to talk about adoption policy and the Magnitsky Act."

Associated Press writers Nekesa Mumbi Moody in New York, Julie Bykowicz, Mary Clare Jalonick and Michael Biesecker in Washington, and Nataliya Vasilyeva in Moscow contributed to this report.

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