

Trump's Pecker problem

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Donald Trump's 34-felony-count indictment moved the spotlight off Trump's former attorney and "fixer," Michael Cohen, by revealing that Trump's one-time close friend, David Pecker, has testified against him.

Pecker ran American Media International, publisher of the supermarket tabloid National Enquirer, when Trump announced for president in June 2015. Trump met with Pecker and Cohen that August and orchestrated a "catch-and-kill scheme" to influence the 2016 election. Pecker agreed to be Trump's "eyes and ears" in identifying negative stories about Trump. Pecker promised to alert Cohen so Trump could pay off accusers through AMI, which would bury their stories to help Trump's campaign. The conspiracy violated election and tax laws, making the falsified payments felonies.

Three stories were bought and buried. A Trump Tower doorman got \$30,000 for his claim that Trump fathered an out-of-wedlock child. Playboy model Karen McDougal got \$150,000 for her account of a ten-month affair with Trump. Porn-star Stormy Daniels got \$130,000 for her story about another sexual relationship with Trump.

Daniels was paid in October 2016, shortly after Trump was heard on the Access Hollywood tape bragging about sexually assaulting women. Afraid another sex scandal would kill his candidacy, Trump wanted to silence Daniels during the campaign's final two weeks. Significantly, Trump told Cohen to try delaying payment until after the election, because then it wouldn't matter if the story became public, and Trump could avoid paying altogether. So much for the claim that Trump paid Daniels to save Melania from embarrassment!

Cohen fronted Daniels' \$130,000 payment. The indictment says Trump falsified business records for tax purposes by signing 11 checks reimbursing Cohen \$260,000, inflated so Cohen could fraudulently declare the payments as income.

Trump invited Pecker to his Inauguration and a White House dinner as thanks for Pecker's help with the hush-money problem. Now, Trump has a different problem. His old friend Pecker has become the prosecution's new star witness.

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