



## LEGAL

## New Trump-Russia subplot: Mueller and Barr are 'good friends'



Then-Attorney General William Barr speaks with reporters at a news conference in Washington in 1991, as then Assistant Attorney General Robert Mueller stands nearby. Barr, who President Donald Trump nominated to return to his old job, said his old friend Mueller is a 'straight shooter.' | Barry Thumma/AP Photo

By **DARREN SAMUELSON**

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Robert Mueller, for 30 years — and somehow President Donald Trump seems fine with that.

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The relationship, which Barr described in public Tuesday during his Senate confirmation hearing, is both a source of reassurance to Democrats worried about Barr's attitude toward Mueller's probe and a reminder of the small size of Washington's legal and law enforcement worlds.

Why it isn't more troubling to Trump, who, Barr said, is aware of the relationship, remains a mystery.

Barr and Mueller first crossed paths at the Justice Department during the George H.W. Bush administration. But the relationship goes further: Their wives are close friends who attend Bible study



daughters.

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“They have a high level of respect for each other,” said Paul McNulty, a former senior DOJ official who led the department’s policy and communications shop while Barr was attorney general and Mueller served as the head of its Criminal Division. “They have maintained a good friendship ever since.”

During his Senate confirmation hearing, Barr praised Mueller’s “distinguished record of public service” and said the special counsel’s probe is proper and should be allowed to proceed without interference. That’s a sharp contrast to the acting attorney general Barr would replace, Matthew Whitaker, who has [called](#) Mueller’s appointment “ridiculous and “a little fishy,” among other things.

Barr said Trump knows about his friendship with Mueller, saying on Tuesday that the topic came up during a June 2017 meeting he had had with Trump at the White House to discuss the possibility that he might serve as Trump’s personal lawyer in the Russia investigation.

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Trump asked Barr how well he knew Mueller, and Barr said he replied that the two families “were good friends and would be good friends when this was all over and so forth, and he was interested in that.”

Barr said Trump also asked him what he thought about the special counsel’s “integrity and so forth and so on.”

“I said Bob is a straight shooter and should be dealt with as such,” Barr said he replied, adding that he told the president he also wasn’t interested in working as his personal attorney and “never heard from him again” until the opening for the attorney general post came up again late last year.





The Barr-Mueller connection is all the more striking given Trump's repeated complaints about the special counsel's relationship with former FBI Director James Comey. Conservatives have long [cited](#) the bond between Mueller and Comey — whose firing by Trump prompted the special counsel's appointment — as evidence that Mueller is hopelessly conflicted. Trump has piled on in [Twitter missives](#) and media interviews, calling the two men “best friends” working in tandem to tar his presidency.

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“I could give you 100 pictures of him and Comey hugging and kissing each other,” the president [told](#) The Daily Caller last September.

Mueller and Comey are former Justice Department colleagues, but sources close to both men, and Comey himself, have insisted the president has exaggerated their bond.



number. I've never been to his house. I don't know his children's names," Comey told Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) last month during a joint House hearing with the former FBI director. "I think I had a meal once alone with him in a restaurant. ... We're not friends in any social sense."

For their part, Trump and Barr do not appear to have deep ties. While Barr donated \$2,700 to Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, he also gave \$55,000 to a political action committee supporting Jeb Bush's primary effort.

Barr told senators he "did not pursue this position" of attorney general under Trump, and the 68-year-old lawyer initially resisted the Republican president's overtures to serve again as attorney general.

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BY MATTHEW CHOI

Trump has [mentioned](#) Barr only once on Twitter, on the day he announced the nomination. Nor did he hold a White House event to announce Barr's nomination.

If confirmed, Barr would supervise Mueller's now 20-month-old probe into alleged Russian collusion with the Trump campaign, from the special counsel's budget to subpoenas and criminal indictments.



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It won't be the first time Barr has been Mueller's boss.

During the George W. Bush administration, the two men often worked together on sensitive issues.

At the department's 1991 news conference rolling out its annual budget request, for example, Barr, then deputy attorney general, was joined by Mueller, then the assistant attorney general in charge of the Criminal Division, to answer reporters' questions about the Bush administration's spending plans to combat white-collar crime, defense procurement fraud and child pornography.

Later that year, during Barr's confirmation hearing to serve as Bush's attorney general, Barr noted that he was overseeing Mueller in a wide-ranging federal investigation into the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, a politically connected Luxembourg-based bank that would later plead guilty to running a wide-scale money laundering scheme.





indictment of two Libyan officials who were charged with bombing Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988.

And just ahead of the 1992 presidential election, Barr and Mueller pushed back against House Democratic demands seeking the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the first Bush administration's dealings with Iraq before the Persian Gulf War. "No amount of hysterical rhetoric or political cheap shots can substitute for evidence that warrants triggering the statute," Mueller told the congressional panel during a highly charged hearing, according to a CNN report from the time.



## LEGAL

## Trump's AG nominee pledges to allow Mueller to complete investigation

BY MARIANNE LEVINE AND DARREN SAMUELSOHN

Former H.W. Bush DOJ official George Terwilliger III, who sat behind Barr at Tuesday's Senate confirmation session, told Politico in an email that the two men still share a "great mutual professional respect.

"In the sense that anytime you work extensively with professional colleagues, especially on matters of some moment, who become friends when there is such mutual respect, I would describe them as friends," he said.





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Michael Zeldin, a former Mueller aide at DOJ, said the Mueller-Barr relationship would help give the two men confidence in each other's judgment and analysis.

But he doubted that either would make decisions based on those ties. "You just don't see that at this level of the Justice Department," he said.

During Barr's hearing, senators from both parties pressed the attorney general nominee on whether he would give Mueller the funding he needs to finish his investigation and see to it that a final accounting of the special counsel's work be made public. On both issues, Barr said yes. He also said he would reject any presidential order that he fire Mueller.

Senators on the Judiciary panel also pressed Barr for more details about the tight-lipped Mueller. Would Barr describe the special counsel as a fair-minded person, Judiciary Chairman Lindsey Graham asked?

"Absolutely," Barr replied.



to Trump and the country. Yes, said the nominee.

Invoking one of Trump's favorite epithets about the Russia probe, the South Carolina senator asked Barr whether he believes Mueller "would be involved in a witch hunt against anybody."

"I don't believe Mr. Mueller would be involved in a witch hunt," he replied.

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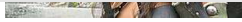
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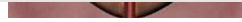
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