

## THE EPOCH TIMES



Patrick Byrne in Washington, DC, on Dec. 15, 2020. (Samira Bouaou/The Epoch Times)

PREMIUM **DONALD TRUMP**

# EXCLUSIVE: Patrick Byrne on His December 2020 White House Meeting With Trump

By [Eva Fu](#) and [Roman Balmakov](#) | July 15, 2022 Updated: July 16, 2022

**A** Print

Patrick Byrne met with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office on Dec. 18, 2020, to urge him to investigate allegations of election fraud. Byrne, the founder and former CEO of online retailer Overstock, is set to testify before the Jan. 6 House Select Committee on July 15.

In an exclusive interview with The Epoch Times, Byrne recounted his meeting with Trump, which included former national security adviser Michael Flynn and [Sidney Powell](#), former attorney to Trump's campaign and former federal prosecutor, along with a number of [White House](#) officials.

The roughly 4.5-hour meeting was “nothing like it has been reported,” Byrne said in an interview with EpochTV's “Facts Matter” program on July 14.

Byrne said he used a prior invitation from a White House staffer for a tour of the building as a way to gain entry with Flynn and Powell, with the hope of getting to talk to the president about his plan to investigate the widespread allegations of voter fraud.

“We were always after the most minimal on that range of options, which was to do a quick investigation that we said could be done in a few days,” Byrne said of the plan.

## ‘Perfectly Reasonable Conversation’

Byrne described a chance encounter with the president as he walked by that enabled the group to meet in the Oval Office. The trio presented to Trump two executive orders –one signed by former President Barack Obama in 2015 and one by Trump [in 2018](#)– which, they said, gave Trump the authority to launch an investigation in the event of foreign interference in the election.



President Donald Trump looks on during a ceremony in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington on Dec. 7, 2020. (Saul Loeb/AFP via Getty Images)

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“It has nothing to do with the theories of vote flipping from space. It has nothing to do with the alleged South Korean jets, or Germany this, or Italy that, or any of that,” Byrne said.

Instead, Byrne said, “the argument that was made to the president was that under two executive orders ... that say if a foreign nation interferes in one of our elections, disrupts an election, the president really gets a range of options.”

According to Byrne, these options ranged from “something very light-handed, like, ‘let’s have a quick investigation’ to something more substantial, like, ‘let’s have a serious investigation.’”

Much of the conversation prior to the arrival of White House attorneys in the room, according to Byrne, centered on the question of whether multiple government documents constituted enough justification to launch an investigation based on the authority given in the executive orders.

The documents included an Oct. 30, 2020, pre-election [warning](#) by the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) that Iranian state actors were targeting U.S. state websites to obtain voter registration data—and were successful in at least one state; an Oct. 22 [warning](#) of unauthorized access to IT systems used by U.S. election officials and election influence campaign by Iranian state actors; and an FBI, CISA, and DNI [statement](#) on the SolarWinds Orion vulnerability.

“That was a perfectly reasonable conversation to have,” Byrne said. “Everybody was acutely aware that every word we were saying was historic, could be judged by history, should be judged by history.”

Byrne, who said he didn’t vote for Trump in 2016 and hadn’t ever voted Republican, said he was impressed at “how smart he [Trump] is,” which never came across “from the way he was portrayed in the media.”



President Donald Trump lawyer and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani speaks to media while flanked by Trump campaign senior legal adviser Jenna Ellis (R) at a press conference at the Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington on Nov. 19, 2020. (Charlotte Cuthbertson/The Epoch Times)

## ‘No Uniforms’

Trump studied the documents in silence as he received them and then made precise comments, Byrne said.

“So what is it you folks are asking me to do?” Trump eventually asked, leaning back, according to Byrne.

Byrne said he laid out several choices that Trump could make to pursue a “very quick and dirty investigation.”

“That’s why I think that if there’s any charges for them, they should come after me” rather than Trump.

The first option Byrne laid out was to investigate “the obvious six counties where the voting record was stopped,” he said.

Or, a more “heavy-handed option,” he added, would be to target 31 counties previously selected by a political scientist.

“He [Trump] said immediately: ‘just go with the six.’”

Byrne then suggested a cyber team could make copies of hard drives to conduct forensic analysis. Alternatively, investigators could travel to the counties and remain on site for several days to count the ballots and livestream the forensic checks.

To lead the investigation, Byrne proposed a joint team composed of cyber analysts from the United States Marshals Service under the Justice Department and the National Guard.





Former national security adviser Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn (Ret.) speaks at the “Let the Church ROAR” National Prayer Rally on the National Mall in Washington on Dec. 12, 2020. (Samira Bouaou/The Epoch Times)

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At that point, Pat Cipollone, then-White House counsel—who had joined the meeting at some point and was sitting behind Byrne—stepped forward to raise objections, according to Byrne.

“Mr. President, the nation will go nuts if they see even one uniform around this,” he said, according to Byrne’s recollection. Others, including Flynn, also opposed the idea.

“The DHS [Department of Homeland Security] has teams that are perfectly adequate for this,” Byrne recalled Flynn saying after a second or two of silence.

Byrne made his case again.

“Sir, just to be clear, obviously, it’s your choice, not my choice,” he said. “I think that we’re in this national crisis because we’ve had a complete breakdown of trust, and I’m not sure that doesn’t extend to the FBI and the DHS.”

“If this is all about reinvigorating the system of trust, the U.S. courts are very trusted and the military is very trusted,” and the National Guard, while in uniform, consists of citizen soldiers, making their presence more acceptable, he said he argued.

Trump let him finish “that whole spiel” before voting him down.

“He said, ‘Pat, no uniforms.’ I said, ‘Yes, sir,’” Byrne recalled.

Byrne insists that he’s the only one who ever put the idea of “uniforms” on the table. “It was not Donald Trump, not anyone else.”

“It was on the table for about 28 seconds. And everybody in the room said no. And Donald Trump said no,” he said. “It was robustly put down.”

## ‘Obstructionists’

Byrne said Trump that evening hinted at least twice that the idea of leaving the White House held an appeal.

“I’ll never spend a night in this town again. I’ve got my golf courses, I’ve got my friends. Trust me Pat, my life’s going to get a lot better,” he said, according to Byrne. “But how can I do that? If I think that this election was stolen and there might be a foreign element involved, how can I really do that?”



Outgoing President Donald Trump waves as he boards Marine One at the White House on Jan. 20, 2021. (Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images)

“He was anything but some crazed tyrant clutching to power,” Byrne said.

What also became clear, he said, was that Trump “was being completely undermined by everyone around him.”

Trump, at one moment, turned to Cipollone to express his disappointment that he hadn’t been alerted to the executive powers.

“Why didn’t you even tell me about these orders, Pat? ... Why did I have to hear it from them? At least they want to fight for me.”

“Mr. President, I’m not your campaign lawyer. I’m your White House lawyer,” Cipollone answered, according to Byrne.

“This man [Cipollone] has been telling staffers systematically ... that we have to get you out of here, [that] we have to get the president in the transition mode, just get him to concede,” Byrne said he told Trump, adding that he could get White House staffers to back up his statements within half an hour.



Pat Cipollone, former President Trump's White House counsel, exits a conference room during a break in his interview at the Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. House Office Building on July 8, 2022. (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)



Cipollone's response according to Byrne was: "Mr. President, you know how hard I've been working for you?" Byrne then watched as Cipollone and several other officials "stormed out."

"They stormed out three different times," he said. "I was shocked at how they treated the president. I didn't even vote for the guy. I didn't even really like him until this meeting, frankly."

"They were just so clearly being obstructionists," Byrne said. "I was hearing that they were being told, if you get the president out the door, there'll be a million dollar job for you in such-and-such lobbying firm. But if you don't, your kids aren't getting into Yale and your kids are getting thrown out of the school they're in."

"This was going on up and down the DOJ and up and down the administration."

According to Byrne, one of the White House lawyers told Trump that he had the authority to appoint Powell as special counsel if he chose to do so.

"Finally the lawyer said, 'Mr. President, you don't have to fight with us. You can just make Sidney Powell that special counsel just by saying it. You don't have to sign anything,'" Byrne recalled.

About 30 minutes later, Trump was so fed up with his White House attorneys, Byrne said that's what he did.

"I'm saying it, Sidney Powell is now a special counsel," Byrne recalled the president saying.



Sidney Powell in Washington on May 30, 2019. (Samira Bouaou/The Epoch Times)

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“Another lawyer spoke up and said, ‘you can’t do that, she needs security clearance. It is going to take months to get a security clearance,’” Byrne said. He then said Flynn told the president he had the same authority to grant her a top secret clearance verbally, which he said the president gave.

“It was left sort of with a rough understanding this was going to happen,” Byrne said. The three—Byrne, Powell, and Flynn—left somewhere past midnight with a sense of excitement that they were “clearing up the mystery.”

Over the weekend, though, when Powell tried to get a White House ID and desk, they discovered the arrangement “had all fallen through.”

Byrne said he was later told that lawyer and former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani had convinced the president to back out of the plan.

Giuliani on his radio program on July 14 recalled the events at the White House during the meeting.

He said he was called over to the White House by the president and reviewed the documents “purporting to show foreign involvement in the election.”

“I read through them carefully, I came back, and I said it’s clear to me that there’s not enough here,” Giuliani said.

He said the president “didn’t disagree at all” with him and Giuliani thought “it was his sense anyway.”

“Well, then that’s it,” Giuliani said the president said. He added that “at some point, the president made it very clear he wanted them out of the White House, and they were escorted out of the White House, one of them by me.”

Questioning election results and calling for an investigation hadn’t been viewed as controversial until that November, Byrne said.

“I didn’t see that as a huge deal between being in a constitutional crisis that could end the nation—which I knew where we’d be if we tried to choke down the election that nobody had any real confidence in—or getting an answer like that.”

But “it’s different being an entrepreneur than lawyer,” he noted. “I’m just thinking, gee, our country is going to enter this nebulous, awful space or we can in seven days, whatever, we’ll have a total answer to this. That’s how an entrepreneur thinks.”

The Epoch Times has reached out to Trump, Powell, Flynn, and Cipollone for comments.

*[Click here](#) to watch the full interview.*