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Stormy Daniels sues her former attorney, accusing him of being a ‘puppet’ for Trump

By Beth Reinhard

The porn star Stormy Daniels on Wednesday sued her former lawyer Keith Davidson, accusing him of being a “puppet” for President Trump and releasing text messages that the lawsuit says show “collusion” between Davidson and Trump’s personal attorney.

In the final days of the 2016 election, Davidson and Trump’s attorney, Michael Cohen, negotiated a deal in which Daniels was paid \$130,000 for her silence about an alleged affair with Trump a decade earlier. The text messages — beginning in January, after the non-disclosure agreement was publicly revealed — show Cohen at one point pressing for Daniels to appear on Sean Hannity’s show on Fox News.

“This is no good,” Cohen writes, after Davidson says she won’t be available until the following day. “We need her as by doing tomorrow you just create another news cycle instead of putting an end to this one.”

In a statement, Davidson called the lawsuit “outrageously frivolous.” Davidson said he views the lawsuit as a waiver by Daniels of attorney-client privilege, an interpretation that suggests he is now free to discuss the case with federal prosecutors scrutinizing the payments as part of an investigation of Cohen for potential bank and wire fraud.

Davidson has given prosecutors “limited electronic correspondence,” The Washington Post reported in April. But, because of attorney-client privilege, he has been turning over private correspondence with Daniels to her current attorney, Michael Avenatti, for his review rather than giving it directly to investigators, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

“Thankfully, the truth can now finally come out to rebut the false narrative about Attorney Davidson that Mr. Avenatti has been pushing in his more than 175 television appearances and countless other media interviews,” said David Wedge, a spokesman for Davidson.

In the lawsuit, filed in Superior Court in Los Angeles, Daniels accuses Davidson of withholding information, including correspondence with Cohen, from her and Avenatti. Daniels is seeking punitive damages and attorney’s fees in the lawsuit, the third suit she has filed in the past three months related to the deal covering her alleged sexual relationship with Trump.

Cohen is also named in the suit.

Cohen's attorney, Brent Blakely, said, "This new lawsuit filed by Stephanie Clifford a.k.a. Stormy Daniels has no merit whatsoever as to my client, Michael Cohen, and appears to be yet another publicity stunt."

The new court filing comes one week after a federal judge in New York rebuked Avenatti for his frequent television interviews in what she called a "publicity tour," leading him to withdraw his request to intervene in a dispute over records seized in the investigation into Cohen by federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York.

Daniels originally sued Cohen and the president in March, seeking to void the non-disclosure agreement. A second lawsuit accuses Trump of defamation.

The new suit says Davidson breached his fiduciary duty to his client through his communications with Cohen. It alleges that Davidson "secretly tipped off" Cohen to Daniels's plans to sue him, leading Cohen to seek a gag order on Daniels in a private arbitration proceeding.

A series of Jan. 17 texts, filed with the suit, show the back-and-forth between Cohen and Davidson about whether she should speak publicly and about the possibility of an appearance with Hannity, who is close with the president. Cohen revealed in court in April that Hannity was among his three legal clients in the past year and a half.

"I have her tentatively scheduled for Hannity tonight," Cohen wrote at one point.

After initially pressing for her to appear that night, Cohen and people he does not name changed course. "Let's forget tonight," he wrote. "They would rather tomorrow so they can promote the heck out of the show."

Later that night, Cohen wrote, "The wise men all believe the story is dying and don't think it's smart for her to do any interviews."

Without offering evidence, the suit alleges that the "wise men" included Trump.

After Davidson agreed Daniels would do no interviews, Cohen responded, "Thanks pal."

"Mr. Davidson abdicated his role as an advocate and fiduciary of his client Ms. Clifford and instead elected to be a puppet for Mr. Cohen and Mr. Trump in order to advance their interests at the expense of Ms. Clifford," the suit says.

Representatives for Fox News and Hannity did not respond Wednesday to requests for comment.

Michael Padula, a lawyer representing Davidson, said the texts do not reflect any inappropriate or unethical dealings.

"That two lawyers on opposite sides of negotiating a deal would be talking and that that amounts to collusion and not acting in best interest of his client is totally absurd," he said.

Davidson and Cohen have interacted in other cases, including one in which Cohen collected a six-figure fee in a deal Davidson helped orchestrate.

Rudolph W. Giuliani, who is advising the president, said Wednesday in a public appearance in Israel that first lady Melania Trump does not believe Daniels's claim of a sexual relationship more than a decade ago. According to CNN, he also said of Daniels: "I respect women — beautiful women and women with value — but a woman who sells her body for sexual exploitation I don't respect. Tell me what damage she suffered. Someone who sells his or her body for money has no good name."

Avenatti responded by calling Giuliani "a misogynist."