

USA
TODAY®
10.14.19



Katie Couric podcast takes on teens and porn

The longtime journalist says young people's easy access is creating a culture of violence against women. **In Life**
GETTY IMAGES

Trump expands pullback in Syria

Nicholas Wu
USA TODAY

Speaking in a television interview Sunday morning, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said President Donald Trump had ordered a “deliberate withdrawal” of U.S. forces from northern Syria, an even more comprehensive withdrawal than had been previously ordered.

Appearing on CBS’ “Face the Nation,” Esper told host Margaret Brennan that after discussions with the president, and as Turkish troops continued their assault against Kurdish forces further than originally expected, the decision had been made to withdraw about 1,000 troops, rather than just the 50 who had been previously ordered to withdraw.

“I spoke with the president last night after discussions with the rest of the national security team and he di-

See SYRIA, Page 6A

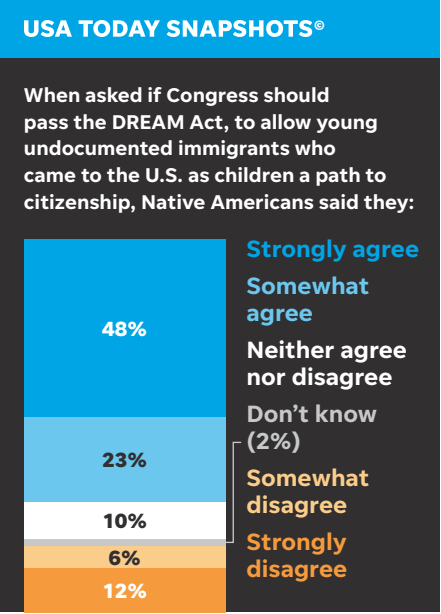


Turkish-backed Syrian fighters evacuate a comrade near Ras al-Ain. NAZEER AL-KHATIB AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

0 89505 01005 9

4.2
PLEASE RECYCLE
©COPYRIGHT 2019
USA TODAY,
A division of
Gannett Co., Inc.

HOME DELIVERY
1-800-872-0001, USATODAYSERVICE.COM



SOURCE Latino Decisions 2018 poll
AMY BARNETTE, DAVID ANESTA/USA TODAY

IN UKRAINE, TRUTH
HARD TO PIN DOWN

Conspiracy theories pushed by Trump thrive in the young democracy battling corruption and distrust

SPENCER HOLLADAY/USA TODAY NETWORK, AND EPA-EFE, GETTY IMAGES

Kim Hjelmgaard
USA TODAY

VODIANE, Ukraine – In a muddy field 5,000 miles from Washington, D.C., are a set of gas wells that extend several thousand feet underground.

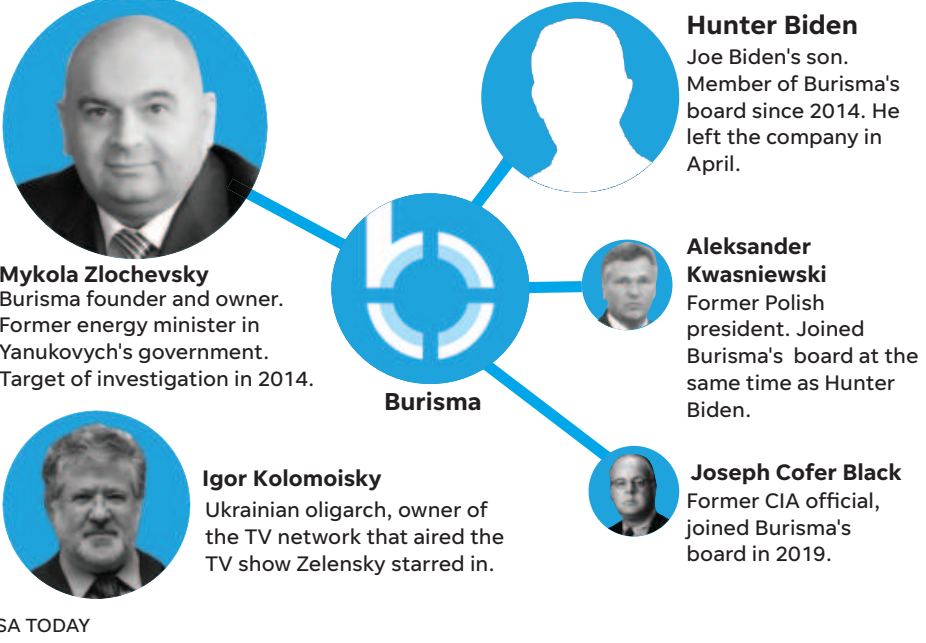
The wells are owned by Burisma, a Ukrainian company registered in Cyprus – a company no one outside the energy industry would have known a month ago.

Now this place is ground zero for a central claim – one with no credible evidence – in a scandal that has engulfed the Trump administration in an impeachment inquiry: that former Vice President Joe Biden forced the Ukrainian government to fire a prosecutor in order to protect his son Hunter Biden, who served on Burisma’s board.

Burisma’s gas fields are ringed by woodlands and an assortment of post-

See UKRAINE, Page 4A

Connections to Burisma



USA TODAY

COLUMBUS DAY OR IS IT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY? Many ditch explorer to honor Native Americans

For many Americans, the second Monday in October is a celebration of Italian heritage and Christopher Columbus’ 1492 voyage to the Americas. But a growing number of cities, states and universities are replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day.

At least eight states, 10 universities and more than 130 cities across 34

states now observe Indigenous Peoples Day as an alternative to the federally recognized Columbus Day, which they say glorifies the mistreatment and colonization of Native Americans.

Although Columbus is often credited as being the “discoverer” of the New World, millions of people already inhabited the Americas, and the Vikings had

reached North America nearly five centuries earlier. Columbus made four expeditions to the Caribbean and South America over two decades, enslaving and decimating local populations and opening the floodgates of European colonization.

By Grace Hauck

Full story on 3A

Advertisement

Costa Rica Natural Paradise 9-Day Tour \$1295 + tax & fees

Volcanoes, Beaches & Rainforests. Includes All Meals, All Hotels & All Activities.



Explore Costa Rica on a Fully Guided Tour with Caravan—Call Now for Choice Dates!

Day 1 Welcome to the “rich coast”, friendly land of democracy and natural beauty. Airport transfers provided.

Day 2 Visit the artisan village of Sarchi. Enjoy a guided tour at a coffee plantation.

Day 3 Visit a wildlife rescue center. Stay two nights at Fortuna near Arenal Volcano.

Day 4 Cruise on the Rio Frio. Enjoy a relaxing soak in the volcanic hot springs.

Day 5 Hike on the Hanging Bridges. Enjoy two relaxing nights on the Pacific Coast.

Day 6 Visit Leatherback Turtle National Park. Enjoy your world class beach resort.

Day 7 Cruise on the Tarcoles River. Enjoy birdwatching and crocodile spotting. Stay next to Manuel Antonio National Park.

Day 8 Visit Manuel Antonio National Park. Hike the rainforest and along beach coves.

Day 9 Tour ends after breakfast. Airport transfers provided. Hasta la vista!—Caravan

Detailed Tour Itinerary at Caravan.com

Costa Rica map showing tour route: Arenal Volcano, Rio Frio Cruise, Fortuna, Coffee Tour, Sarchi, San José, Manuel Antonio, Tarcoles Cruise, Wildlife Rescue, Guanacaste, Hanging Bridges, Turtle Park. Legend: ● Daystop, ● Overnight.

About Caravan Tours
Caravan began selling fully guided tours in 1952. Caravan’s strong buying power gives you great vacations at prices much lower than you can find anywhere. Join the smart shoppers and experienced travelers. Let Caravan handle all the details. Enjoy a well-earned, worry-free vacation. Happy Travels!—Caravan

Choose an Affordable Tour + tax & fees
Costa Rica 9 days \$1295
Guatemala with Tikal 10 days \$1395
Panama & Canal Cruise 8 days \$1295

FREE 24-Page Brochure
1-800-CARAVAN • Caravan.com

caravan
#1 In Value—Fully Guided Tours Since 1952

Ukraine

Continued from Page 1A

Soviet tropes: crumbling factories and farm buildings, babushkas clutching bags of food as they ride bicycles, bored security officials in fatigues who always seem to require permission from a boss who can never be found.

“There’s no one here who will talk to you. Now go away,” a guard shouted at the entrance to Burisma’s small office in Vodiane, 300 miles southeast of Kyiv, formerly known as Kiev.

“Hunter Biden? Never heard of him,” said Ludmila Rynovaya, 72, a resident of Vodiane’s nearby village. “We’re pretty good at corruption,” she said. “We don’t need Americans to help us.”

Over the course of about a week in Ukraine, the message from two dozen government officials and anti-corruption investigators quickly became clear: The allegations against the Bidens are entirely lacking in evidence.

But they persist, and not only because Trump and his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, keep repeating them.

What is true and what is false is exceptionally hard to pin down in this fledgling democracy, one riddled with regulatory loopholes, poor governance and never-ending budget shortages.

Ukraine is a place of great economic promise, with extensive natural resources and a highly educated, tech-savvy workforce.

But abuses of power and cronyism are rampant, reaching from the highest levels of government to everyday tasks like acquiring a driver’s license, according to more than two dozen Ukrainians interviewed for this story.

“It’s not really corruption, but more a way of saying, ‘Thank you,’” said Vladimir Grigorishin, 49, a Kyiv resident.

He’s a customs “broker,” which means he mediates fees between tax officials and private business owners who rely on foreign-made products. The process involves informally negotiating payments to officials.

Outside Ukraine, this is known as bribery. For Grigorishin, it’s business.

‘The whole thing is manufactured’

There are few, if any, trustworthy voices or credible evidence in Ukraine to back up the allegations peddled by Trump and Giuliani. Even Trump’s staff has repeatedly warned him the claims are baseless.

“Rudy Giuliani’s only interest in Ukraine was to push the idea of an investigation into Biden and then push that idea with the American media, to hype it, and to attack Biden’s son ahead of the U.S. election” next year, said Sergii Leshchenko, a former lawmaker who helped spearhead anti-corruption efforts under former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

“The whole thing is manufactured for Trump’s political advantage,” said Leshchenko, a former journalist.

Allegations like this are not uncommon in Ukraine. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has struggled to confront corruption and misinformation, said Olexiy Haran, a political scientist at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

“After Communism, we’ve had to build a completely new system – all new laws, judges, a constitution. This has created many legal loopholes,” he said.

Many hide in plain sight.

“Speeding tickets are easy to make go away,” said Orest Grigorishin, 23, a Kyiv musician. He views such activity, officially illicit, as essential to surviving in the faction-ridden country.

There are more egregious examples. Some involve people an arm’s length from Trump.

Yuriy Lutsenko is one of the former Ukrainian prosecutors who, according to a whistleblower’s complaint, peddled a series of baseless claims including the one against the Bidens.

Lutsenko is a “lawyer” who has no legal training. He got the job after the law was changed to allow someone without legal qualifications to fill the post.

He has served jail time for embezzlement and abuse of office. His supporters claimed the charges were politically motivated. You hear that a lot here.

“Lutsenko is a crook,” said Daria Kaleniuk, co-founder and executive director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center, a Kyiv-based organization that has led Ukraine’s anti-corruption efforts. “He basically used the general prosecutor’s office that he headed as a kind of public relations office for himself.”

Lutsenko did not return multiple requests for comment.

Museum of corruption

“Ukraine is an extremely good place to be if you’re into making money illegally,” said Sevgil Musaieva, editor of



Heavy machinery owned by Burisma, a Ukrainian natural-gas company linked to an impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump.



Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's estate outside Kyiv is now a museum of corruption. PHOTOS BY ANATOLY SOKOLOV FOR USA TODAY

About Ukraine

■ Ukraine, home to about 45 million people, declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

■ Despite Ukraine’s independence, Russian President Vladimir Putin believes its cultural and linguistic ties to Russia mean it should be part of Russia’s sphere of influence.

■ In 2014, Russian special forces occupied Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, a strategic territory that provides access to the Black Sea. Russia later held a vote in Crimea in which residents opted to become part of Russia. Ukraine maintains the vote was neither free nor fair.



online newspaper Ukrayinska Pravda.

The news outlet published some of the first investigations into Paul Manafort, Trump’s former campaign manager. Manafort is now imprisoned on convictions related to concealing millions of dollars he made in Ukraine.

His client: former President Viktor Yanukovich, a Kremlin-friendly president who was ousted from office in 2014 and now lives in exile in Russia. Ukraine convicted him of treason in January.

Yanukovich abused his office in other ways. Today, his sumptuous estate outside Kyiv, called Mezhyhirya Residence, has been preserved as a kind of museum of corruption.

The estate is furnished in a manner that calls to mind the decadent court of France’s King Louis XIV. Visitors can marvel at its former zoo, pier for yachts, helipad, tennis court, horse stables, rare-breed dog kennel, boxing ring, fleet of vintage cars, spa and shooting range. “Here, you can stand and look over your empire like a real czar,” a visitor remarked as he surveyed the view of the Dnieper River from the balcony of one of the master bedrooms.

That’s partly where Hunter Biden comes in, according to Kaleniuk of the Anti-Corruption Action Center – not as

an example of American corruption, but of Ukrainian reputation management.

Biden joined Burisma’s board after Yanukovich’s ouster, when some Ukrainian companies tried to distance themselves from pro-Moscow authorities. They asked Westerners and other high-profile figures to sit on their boards.

“Ukraine is full of (people) who acquire wealth illegally through their connections to politics,” Kaleniuk said. “Then they try to whitewash this wealth and their reputations with the help of an army of Western lawyers and public relations types.”

Burisma, Ukraine’s largest private natural-gas company, is owned by Mykola Zlochevsky. He served in Yanukovich’s government and has been at the center of multiple corruption cases.

“I’m not sure that (Hunter) Biden understood the environment he was getting into” when he agreed to serve on Burisma’s board, Musaieva said.

Hazy allegations float from Ukraine to the U.S. Trump and Giuliani have been pushing unsubstantiated allegations that Joe Biden sought to help his son by persuading the Ukrainian government to dismiss a general prosecutor named Viktor Shokin.

In 2014, Shokin began investigating Burisma for money laundering and tax irregularities.

Hunter Biden joined Burisma’s board that same year and was reportedly paid about \$50,000 a month.

The core allegation from Trump and Giuliani is that Joe Biden intervened to have Shokin fired in order to halt a criminal investigation into Burisma. To help his son’s business interests, essentially.

But no one who spoke with USA TODAY said those allegations have any merit, and no credible evidence has emerged to support them – though several experts said it seems clear Hunter Biden got the job because of his name.

Hunter Biden wasn’t the subject of the probe, according to Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau, an independent government agency that has worked closely with the FBI.

No one disputes that Joe Biden wanted Shokin, the prosecutor, fired. Outside the country, he was viewed as corrupt.

“The pressure to remove Shokin did not just come from Biden,” said Pavlo Klimkin, Ukraine’s minister of foreign affairs in Poroshenko’s administration. “The pressure also came from the European Union and others. I know. I was in the meetings about this.”

Reliability questioned

Giuliani has appeared on cable TV news shows in the U.S. waving an affidavit signed by Shokin, the prosecutor whom Biden has boasted of forcing out. In it, Shokin says he was fired in 2016 because he was leading a “wide-ranging corruption investigation” into Burisma.

Vitali Kasko, deputy to the new general prosecutor, has a simple response: “Shokin is not a reliable figure.” Kasko once worked for Shokin but resigned,

citing Shokin’s total “lawlessness.”

Shokin did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Besides Shokin, Giuliani enlisted the help of Igor Fruman and Lev Parnas, Florida-based associates with family and business connections to Ukraine. They worked to dig up dirt on the Bidens and Hillary Clinton, according to their own admission.

Fruman and Parnas were arrested last week on campaign-finance charges, accused of funneling “foreign money” for candidates and campaigns. The charges don’t appear related to work they were doing on behalf of Giuliani.

The two set up meetings for Giuliani with Ukrainian officials. Meanwhile, according to published reports, they pushed business plans related to the natural gas industry.

“It doesn’t matter who in Ukraine tells you what – a lawyer, a politician, media, someone in business. They are either lying to you or at the very least trying to confuse you,” said Oleksandr Techynskyi. His 2014 documentary “All Things Ablaze” chronicles the revolution that led to Yanukovich’s ouster.

‘These prosecutors are politicians’

Lutsenko, who succeeded Shokin as Ukraine’s general prosecutor, is another one of Giuliani’s sources.

Lutsenko has turned out to be another unreliable narrator, according to several Ukrainian officials. In March, he started making false claims in opinion articles published in The Hill, a U.S. political news website.

His claims should sound familiar. Among them: that Joe Biden pressured Poroshenko to fire Shokin in order to quash a criminal probe into Burisma. That the former U.S. ambassador, Marie Yovanovitch, obstructed Ukrainian authorities’ pursuit of corruption cases.

No credible evidence has emerged to back up either allegation.

The Ukraine office of Transparency International, a Berlin-based corruption monitoring group, said it valued Yovanovitch’s help fighting corruption. But Trump unceremoniously pulled her out of Ukraine in May.

“The best way to think about this is that these prosecutors are politicians,” said Aubrey Belford, an editor for the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project in Ukraine.

Before Lutsenko lost his job in August, he implied he was receptive to reopening the investigation into Burisma. Since then, Lutsenko has said in interviews he knows of no evidence linking the Bidens to wrongdoing.

Now he, too, is under investigation, for protecting illegal casinos in Ukraine. He denies it.

Two countries led by TV stars

Like Trump, Ukraine’s president has spent time in the world of entertainment – and like his U.S. counterpart, he has parlayed this into a political career.

Zelensky starred in a sitcom about an idealistic teacher who is propelled to the presidency after his students film him railing against corruption. In the show, called “Servant of the People,” the video goes viral and a political star is born.

The real-life version is not that different. Zelensky ran on an anti-corruption platform and named his political party “Servant of the People.”

Like Trump, Zelensky is not without controversy. He has close ties to Igor Kolomoisky, a Ukrainian oligarch accused of siphoning about \$5 billion from a bank Ukraine nationalized in 2016. Kolomoisky is the owner of the TV network that aired “Servant of the People.”

Anastasiya Kozlovitseva, of Transparency International’s Ukraine office, said Zelensky’s choice for general prosecutor is encouraging because he is an experienced and credible anti-corruption campaigner. “But we’re waiting to see how Zelensky deals with his ties to Kolomoisky,” she said.

Trump’s scandal is not Zelensky’s biggest problem. Ukraine is fighting a war with Russia that has claimed 13,000 lives, displaced 1.5 million people and led to Ukraine ceding parts of its territory to the region’s superpower.

“There’s a danger we could sign a weak peace deal with Russia that would bring us closer to Putin’s orbit,” said Haran, the political scientist.

And then there is the matter of Zelensky delivering on his campaign promise to end Ukraine’s culture of corruption.

Many politicians have been elected on similar promises, only to be replaced by others who promise it, too. Meanwhile, reformers are regularly threatened and accused of wrongdoing.

“We wanted to drain the swamp here in our country,” Zelensky told Trump in their July call. “We brought in many new people. Not the typical politicians, because we want to have a new type. A new type of government. You are a great teacher for us in that regard.”