

Warmbier parents blast 'evil' North Korea regime after Trump praises Kim

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The parents of Otto Warmbier, an American student who died after 17 months in a North Korean prison, blamed Kim Jong Un's "evil regime" on Friday after U.S. President Donald Trump said he believed the leader's claim not to have known how their son was treated.

Warmbier's parents said they held off commenting during the second summit between Trump and Kim in Hanoi, which was cut short on Thursday after the two sides failed to reach a deal for the reclusive communist nation to give up its nuclear weapons.

"Kim and his evil regime are responsible for the death of our son Otto," Fred and Cindy Warmbier said in a statement. "Kim and his evil regime are responsible for unimaginable cruelty and inhumanity. No excuses or lavish praise can change that."

Trump drew criticism after he praised Kim's leadership and said he accepted Kim's assertion that he had not been aware of how Warmbier was treated while in detention.

"He tells me that he didn't know about it, and I will take him at his word," Trump told a news conference.

It wasn't the first time Trump has faced criticism for appearing to side with autocratic leaders. He gave Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman the benefit of the doubt after the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi last year. In July, Trump refused to blame Russian President Vladimir Putin for interfering in U.S. election.

Prominent Republicans on Thursday did not share Trump's acceptance of Kim's word, including close Trump ally U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham, who said he didn't "buy it for a minute."

Warmbier parents blame Kim Jong Un for son's death. After the family's sharp statement, the White House tried to explain what Trump meant.

"The president agrees with the Warmbier family and holds North Korea responsible for Otto Warmbier's death,"

Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway told Fox News. "What he said was that Chairman Kim says, what he believes Chairman Kim to have said, was that he was not aware of what had happened to Otto Warmbier when it happened."

Warmbier, 22, died on June 19, 2017, shortly after he was flown home to Ohio in a coma after being held by North Korea for 17 months.

"Otto should have never been arrested in the first place and Kim is responsible for that decision and everything that subsequently happened," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch.

Cohen turned over to the committee a copy of a \$35,000 check Trump signed on Aug. 1, 2017, one in a series he said was to reimburse him for paying off Daniels after Trump took office.

Cohen said Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., co-signed another check, again for \$35,000. A lawyer for Donald Jr. did not respond to a request for comment.

The sweeping claims against Trump, from a man who once said he would take a bullet for his boss, come as Mueller appears to be close to completing his investigation into possible collusion between Trump's campaign and Russian efforts to sway the vote. Trump has called the Mueller investigation a "witch hunt."



FILE PHOTO: Cindy Warmbier speaks as her husband Fred, parents of Otto Warmbier, looks on during a symposium at the United Nations headquarters in Manhattan, New York

U.S. officials have said the emails released by WikiLeaks were stolen by Russia as part of Moscow's campaign of hacking and propaganda during the presidential race aimed at sowing discord in the United States and harming Clinton. Trump has previously denied knowing in advance about the release of hacked Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails during the election.

Cohen said he was in Trump's office in July 2016 when Roger Stone, a self-described "dirty trickster" and longtime political adviser to Trump, called the then Republican presidential candidate. Cohen offers Congress 'new details' on Trump. Cohen said Stone told Trump he had been speaking with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who told him there would be a dump of emails within a couple of days that would damage Clinton's campaign.

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Editor's Choice



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Members of the Sikh community demonstrate for a peaceful settlement to the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan, outside the United Nations headquarters in New York



Patrick Drahi, Franco-Israeli businessman and founder of cable and mobile telecoms company Altice Group attends the inauguration of the Altice Campus in Paris



The Virginia State Capitol, the seat of state government of the Commonwealth of Virginia, is pictured in Richmond



A woman selects tomatoes at a market stall in Mexico City, Mexico February 22, 2019. Picture taken February 22, 2019. REUTERS/Daniel Becerril



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Guests arrive for the opening ceremony of the traditional Opera Ball in Vienna, Austria February 28, 2019. REUTERS/Leonhard Foeger



OVERVIEW

Environmentalists are warning the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that its draft plan to continue allowing oil and gas companies to dump unlimited amounts of fracking chemicals and wastewater directly into the Gulf of Mexico is in violation of federal law.

In a letter sent to EPA officials, attorneys for the Center for Biological Diversity warned that the agency's draft permit for water pollution discharges in the Gulf fails to properly consider how dumping wastewater containing chemicals from fracking and acidizing operations would impact water quality and marine wildlife.

The attorneys claim that regulators do not fully understand how the chemicals used in offshore fracking and other well treatments — some of which are toxic and dangerous to human and marine life — can impact marine environments, and crucial parts of the draft permit are based on severely outdated data. Finalizing the draft permit as it stands would be a violation of the Clean Water Act, they argue.

The EPA is endangering an entire ecosystem by allowing the oil industry to dump unlimited amounts of fracking chemicals and drilling waste fluid into the Gulf of Mexico," said Center attorney Kristen Monsell. "This appalling plan from the agency that's supposed to protect our water violates federal law, and shows a disturbing disregard for offshore fracking's toxic threats to sea turtles and other Gulf wildlife." Earlier this year, lawsuits filed by the Center and another group won a temporary moratorium on offshore fracking in the Pacific Ocean, and the groups are currently preparing to challenge fracking in the Santa Barbara Channel under the Endangered Species Act.



Offshore fracking involves pumping water, chemicals and sand at extremely high pressure into undersea wells

Environmentalists Are Warning The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) That Its Decision Is In Violation Of Federal Law

The EPA Plans To Allow Unlimited Dumping Of Fracking Wastewater Into The Gulf Of Mexico

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

to break up rock and sand formations and clear pathways for oil and gas. Offshore drillers also treat wells with corrosive acids, such as hydrochloric acid, in a process known as "acidizing."

The technologies have been used hundreds of times to enhance oil and gas production at hundreds of Gulf wells in recent years, and environmentalists say use of the technology could increase in the future as the industry seeks to maximize production in aging offshore fields. Still, little was publicly known about these "well treatments" until Truthout and environmental groups began filing information requests with federal regulators. Regulators and the fossil fuel industry say offshore fracking operations have a good safety record and tend to be smaller in size compared to onshore operations, but environmentalists continue to worry about the chemicals used in the process because many of them are known to harm marine wildlife. Plus, dolphins and other species in the Gulf are still suffering from the lingering effects of the 2010 BP oil spill.

Under the EPA's current and draft permits, offshore drillers are allowed to dump an unlimited amount of fracking and acidizing chemicals overboard as long as they are mixed with the wastewater that returns from undersea wells. Oil and gas platforms dumped more than 75 billion gallons of these "produced waters" directly into the Gulf of Mexico in 2014 alone, according to the Center's analysis of EPA records.



These large volumes of wastewater cannot contain oil and must meet toxicity standards, but oil and gas operators are only required to test the waste stream a few times a year. Monsell said these tests could easily be conducted at times when few or no fracking chemicals are present in the wastewater. The EPA expects these chemicals to have little impact on the environment because the large volumes of wastewater and the ocean dilute them, but the Center points out that much of the EPA's data on the subject comes from studies prepared in the 1980s and 1990s. Offshore production technology has

advanced since then and hundreds of frack jobs have occurred in the Gulf in the past five years alone.

"All they have to do is ask the Interior Department for this information, because they just compiled it all for us," said Monsell, referring to the thousands of documents recently released to Truthout and the Center under the Freedom of Information Act.

These documents, released under a legal settlement between the Interior Department and the Center, show that regulators approved more than 1,500 frack jobs at over 600 Gulf wells between 2010 and 2014 with permit modifications that were exempted from comprehensive environmental reviews.

Monsell said the EPA's permit is just another example of a federal agency "rubber-stamping" permits for offshore fracking without taking a hard look at how the technology impacts the environment. The EPA, she argues, should prohibit the dumping of hazardous fracking chemicals and other wastes directly into ocean altogether.

"It's the EPA's job to protect water quality from offshore fracking, not rubber-stamp the dumping of the wastewater from this dangerous, disgusting practice," Monsell said.

The draft permit does prohibit the dumping of oil in the Gulf and proposes a new rule that would require oil and gas operators to keep an inventory of the fracking and acidizing chemicals kept on board. This inventory must be made available to regulators upon request. The government's most up-to-date list of offshore fracking chemicals is now 15 years old, and the Interior Department regulators are currently working to update it. (courtesy walkingtimes.com)

Related Does Offshore Fracking Put Endangered Species at Risk?



Environmental groups in California are preparing to file lawsuits against federal regulators for allegedly approving the use of offshore fracking at 23 oil and gas platforms in sensitive Pacific waters without consulting wildlife officials about the potential harms to endangered species, such as sea otters and whales.

The Environmental Defense Center (EDC) and the Santa Barbara Channelkeeper announced last week their intent to sue the two US Interior Department agencies that regulate offshore oil and gas production, alleging that regulators violated the Endangered Species Act when they decided to lift a moratorium on using offshore fracking and other "well stimulation techniques" in the Pacific. Another environmental group, the Center for Biological Diversity, announced on Wednesday that it would file a separate lawsuit against the agencies on similar grounds. That decision to lift the moratorium was made in May after the regulators completed an assessment of the potential environmental impacts of offshore fracking and subsea acid washes, which are used to stimulate oil and gas production in aging offshore wells. Despite protests from environmental groups, the regulators concluded that offshore fracking is not expected to have a "significant impact" on the environment.



Offshore hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" involves injecting water and chemicals into aging undersea wells at high pressure to break up rock and release remaining oil and gas. Acid washes are also used to dissolve rock and make it easier for oil and gas to flow. Federal regulators allow the chemicals used in both processes, some of them toxic, to be dumped directly into the ocean if they are mixed with the wastewater that flows back from undersea wells.

Environmentalists now say that the environmental assessment of these "stimulation techniques" is incomplete because the regulators failed to consult with wildlife agencies, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service, about the potential impacts that well stimulation technologies could have on at least 25 endangered species, including whales, sea otters, fur seals, sea turtles, birds, fish and abalone.

"The government's own analysis identifies potential threats from fracking and acidizing to many threatened and endangered species," said Maggie Hall, a staff attorney at EDC. "Local wildlife risk exposure to toxic chemicals in [fracking flowback fluids], collisions with vessels delivering chemicals to offshore platforms, and harm caused by the heightened risk of oil spills, among other concerns."



The groups are particularly concerned about wildlife in the Santa Barbara Channel, where offshore oil and gas platforms operate near marine wildlife protection areas, and the memory of a massive oil spill in 1969 still weighs heavily on the public mind. Offshore fracking and acid treatments extend the life of oil and gas wells, they argue, which also extends the amount of time that spills and accidents can occur before production shuts down altogether.

Environmentalists and beachgoers in California are on high alert because an oil pipeline near Santa Barbara ruptured last year, leaving beaches covered in oil and bringing back painful memories of the 1969 disaster. "These practices will extend the life of existing oil platforms in a sensitive marine environment, which is still recovering from the May 19, 2015, Plains All American Pipeline rupture that devastated California's coastline," said Kira Redmond, executive director of Channelkeeper. "We need information to understand the potential impacts of these practices so that appropriate measures can be implemented to protect the diverse web of marine life off our coast."



Offshore fracking has been highly controversial in California, where it is unpopular among environmentalists. However, the technology has been most widely used in the Gulf of Mexico.

A recent Truthout investigation found that, under the Obama administration, federal regulators approved more than 1,000 permit modifications for offshore fracking jobs in the Gulf, and virtually all of these were excluded from the kind of environmental review that environmentalists and regulators are now fighting over in California. (Courtesy truthout.org)

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