

Ghislaine Maxwell appeals to Trump for clemency

BY STEPHEN GROVES

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Ghislaine Maxwell, the former girlfriend of Jeffrey Epstein, declined to answer questions from House lawmakers in a deposition Monday, but indicated that if President Donald Trump ended her prison sentence, she was willing to testify that neither he nor former President Bill Clinton had done anything wrong in their connections with Epstein.

The House Oversight Committee had wanted Maxwell to answer questions during a video call to the federal prison camp in Texas where she's serving a 20-year sentence for sex trafficking, but she invoked her Fifth Amendment rights to avoid answering questions that would be self-incriminating. She's come under new scrutiny as law-makers try

to investigate how Epstein, a well-connected financier, was able to sexually abuse underage girls for years.

Amid a reckoning over Epstein's abuse that has spilled into the highest levels of businesses and governments around the globe, lawmakers are searching for anyone who was connected to Epstein and may have facilitated his abuse. So far, the revelations have shown how both Trump and Clinton spent time with Epstein in the 1990s and early 2000s, but they have not been credibly accused of wrongdoing.

During the closed-door deposition Monday, Maxwell's attorney David Oscar Markus said in a statement that "Maxwell is prepared to speak fully and honestly if granted clemency by President Trump."

He added that both Trump and Clinton "are innocent of any wrongdoing," but that "Ms. Maxwell alone can explain why, and the public is entitled to that explanation."

MAXWELL'S APPEAL HITS PUSHBACK

Democrats said that was a brazen effort by Maxwell to have Trump end her prison sentence.

"It's very clear she's campaigning for clemency," said Rep. Melanie Stansbury, a New Mexico Democrat.

Another Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Suhas Subramanyam, described Maxwell's demeanor during the short video call as "robotic" and "unrepentant."

Trump has not ruled out granting Maxwell clemency, but Republican pushback to that notion quickly rose after Maxwell made the appeal.

"NO CLEMENCY. You comply or face punishment," Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, wrote on social media. "You deserve JUSTICE for what you did you monster."

Maxwell has also been seeking to have her conviction overturned, arguing that she was wrongfully convicted. The Supreme Court rejected her appeal last year, but in December she requested that a federal judge in New York consider what her attorneys describe as "substantial new evidence" that her trial was spoiled by constitutional violations.

Maxwell's attorney cited

that petition as he told lawmakers she would invoke her Fifth Amendment rights.

The Republican chair of the committee, Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, told reporters that it was "very disappointing" that Maxwell declined to participate in the deposition.

Family members of the late Virginia Giuffre, one of the most outspoken victims of Epstein, also released a letter to Maxwell making it clear they did not consider her "a bystander" to Epstein's abuse.

"You were a central, deliberate actor in a system built to find children, isolate them, groom them, and deliver them to abuse," Sky and Amanda Roberts wrote in the letter addressed to Maxwell.

Maxwell was moved from a federal prison in Florida to

a low-security prison camp in Texas last summer after she participated in two-days of interviews with Deputy Attorney General

Todd Blanche.

Comer had also subpoenaed her at the time, but her attorneys have consistently told the committee that she wouldn't answer questions. However, Comer came under pressure to hold the deposition as he pressed for the committee to enforce subpoenas on Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. After Comer threatened them with contempt of Congress charges, they both agreed to sit for depositions later this month.

Comer has been haggling with the Clintons over whether that testimony should be held in a public hearing, but Comer reiterated Monday that he would insist on holding closed-door depositions and later releasing transcripts and video.

LAWMAKERS REVIEW UNREDACTED FILES

Meanwhile, several lawmakers visited a Justice Department office in Washington Monday to look through unredacted versions of the files on Epstein that the department has released to comply with a law passed by Congress last year. As part of an arrangement with the Justice Department, lawmakers were given access to the over 3 million released files in a reading room with four computers. Lawmakers can only make handwritten notes, and their staff are not allowed in with them.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, spent several hours in the reading room Monday morning. He told reporters as he returned to the Capitol that even if all the House members who triggered the vote on releasing the files "spent every waking hour over at the Department of Justice, it would still take us months to get through all of those documents."

"I think that the Department of Justice has been in a cover-up mode for many months and has been trying to sweep the entire thing under the rug," he added.

Democrats on Raskin's committee are looking ahead to a Wednesday hearing with Attorney General Pam Bondi, where they are expected to sharply question her on the publication of the Epstein files. The Justice Department failed to redact the personal

information of many victims, including inadvertently releasing nude photos of them. Democrats also say the Justice Department redacted information that should have been made public, including information that could lead to scrutiny of Epstein's associates.

"Over and over we begged them, please be careful, please be more careful," said Jennifer Freeman, an attorney representing survivors. "The damage has already been done. It feels incompetent, it feels intimidating and it feels intentional."

Release of the files has set

in motion multiple political crises around the world, including in the United Kingdom, where Prime Minister Keir Starmer is clinging to his job after it was revealed his former ambassador to the U.S. had maintained close ties to Epstein. But Democratic

lawmakers bemoaned that so far U.S. political figures seem to be escaping unscathed.

"I'm just afraid that the general worsening and degradation of American life has somehow conditioned people not to take this as seriously as we should be taking it," Raskin said.



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