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Under-fire Trump commerce secretary confirms he visited Epstein's island

10 February 2026

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Ana Faguy and Brandon Drenon

on Capitol Hill



Watch: Lutnick confirms his family had lunch with Epstein on a visit to the late sex offender's island

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has confirmed he visited Jeffrey Epstein's island in 2012, contradicting previous claims that he had cut ties with the sex offender years earlier, before he was convicted.

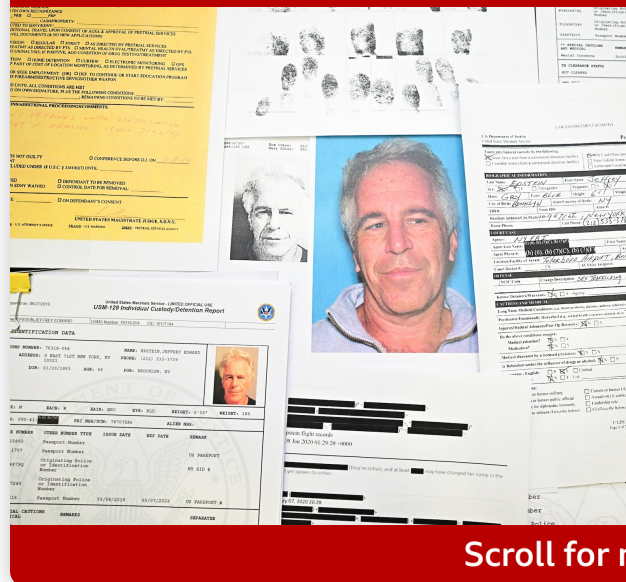
"I did have lunch with him as I was on a boat going across on a family vacation," Lutnick testified on Capitol Hill on Tuesday. "My wife was with me, as were my four children and nannies ... We had lunch on the island. That is true. For an hour."

Correspondence about the visit was included in Epstein documents released by the US Department of Justice.

Some lawmakers have called on Lutnick to resign, but on Tuesday the White House said he had the full support of US President Donald Trump.

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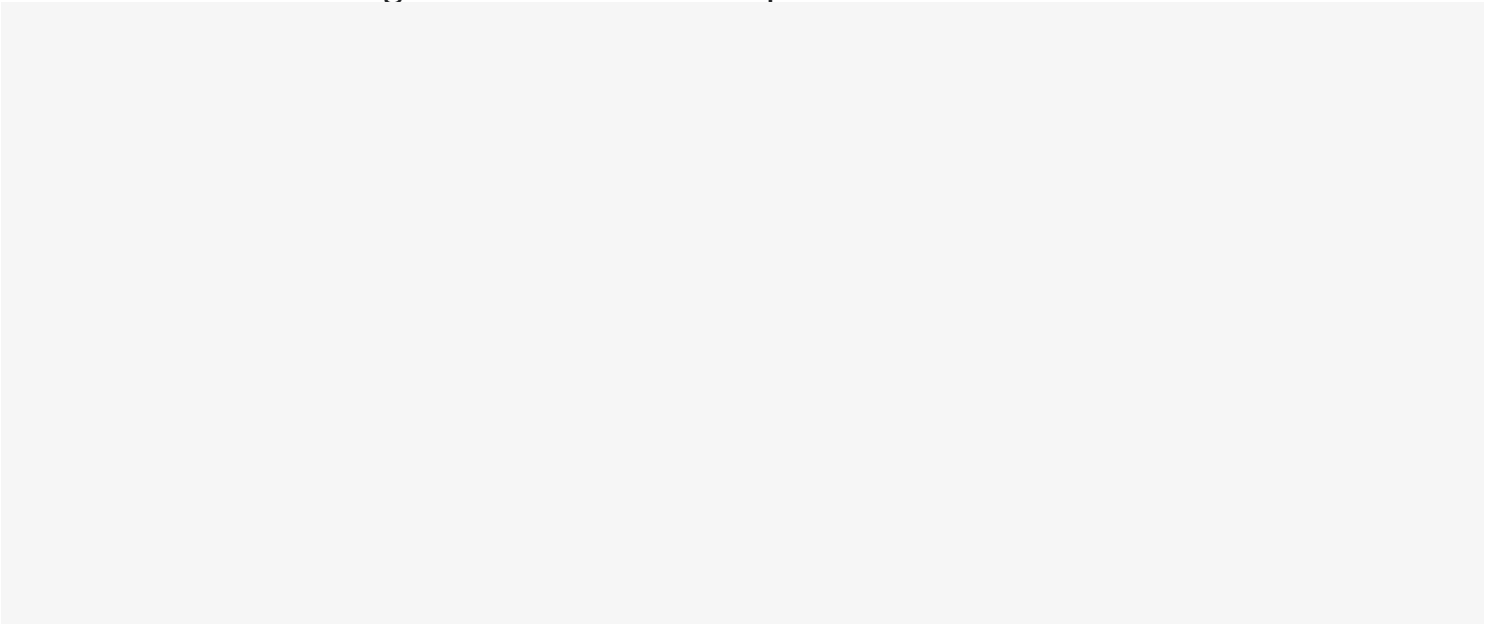


Images: Getty; BBC

Lutnick's visit to the island was revealed in emails released by the justice department.

In one email from December 2012, Lutnick's wife Allison wrote to Epstein's assistant on what appeared to be the eve of the visit: "We are looking forward to visiting you", and, "We would love to join you for lunch".

The commerce secretary previously told Congress he cut ties with Epstein in 2005



In Tuesday's testimony, he said: "Over the next 14 years, I met him two other times that I can recall."

The justice department files show Lutnick visited Epstein's Caribbean island on 23 December, 2012. That came four years after Epstein was convicted for soliciting prostitution from a child.

Lutnick's testimony on Capitol Hill marked the first time he publicly confirmed the visit.

"I don't recall why we did it, but we did it," he said Tuesday, referring to the lunch.

Lutnick, who is considered the architect of Trump's global tariffs policy, has not been accused of any wrongdoing in relation to Epstein.

The other time, outside of meeting Epstein on his island, was a year and a half after that when Lutnick said he had an hour-long meeting with Epstein.

Lutnick noted that within the millions of pages of Epstein documents released by the justice department, roughly 10 emails connect him with Epstein.

"Over a 14-year period, I did not have any relationship with him, I barely had anything to do with that person," he said.

Senator Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat from Maryland, grilled Lutnick about the conflicting accounts.

"The issue is not that you engaged in any wrongdoing in connection with Jeffrey Epstein, but that you totally misrepresented the extent of your relationship with him, to the Congress, to the American people and to the survivors of his despicable criminal and predatory acts," he said.

Lutnick is among a series of high-profile people named in the more than 3.5 million documents that have been released by the justice department, as mandated by law.

The revelation that Lutnick visited Epstein's island long after he asserted that he had cut off contact has led to bipartisan calls for the commerce secretary to resign from the Trump administration.

Democratic congressman Ro Khanna of California and Republican congressman

Thomas Massie of Kentucky, who co-sponsored the law that compelled the justice department to release the Epstein files last year, both urged Lutnick to step down.



Lutnick says he "did not have any relationship" with Epstein

After viewing unredacted copies of the files, Khanna revealed the names of six other people on Tuesday that he says were improperly blacked out.

Among them was retail billionaire Les Wexner. Hours after Massie identified him on Monday, the justice department partially unredacted the file.

Deputy US Attorney General Todd Blanche said the redaction was removed because Wexner's name "already appears in the files thousands of times. DoJ is hiding nothing."

The BBC has contacted the justice department for comment.

Wexner, the former CEO of Victoria's Secret, is identified in a 2019 FBI document as a potential "co-conspirator".

Appearing in the documents does not necessarily imply any wrongdoing.

Wexner has previously alleged that Epstein stole millions of dollars from him while working as his financial adviser.

A legal representative for Wexner told the BBC: "The Assistant US Attorney told Mr Wexner's legal counsel in 2019 that Mr Wexner was being viewed as source of information about Epstein and was not a target in any respect.

"Mr Wexner co-operated fully by providing background information on Epstein and was never contacted again."

Another name revealed by Khanna is Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, CEO of Dubai Ports World. The BBC has contacted him for comment.

The BBC is trying to confirm the identities of the other four people whose names have been unredacted.

While Lutnick was testifying on one side of Capitol Hill, survivors of Epstein abuse

gathered on the other to announce Virginia's Law, legislation that aims to remove the time limit for survivors of sexual abuse to file civil claims.

The legislation is named for Virginia Giuffre, who was one of the most well-known survivors of Epstein's sexual abuse. She died by suicide in 2025.

Giuffre's sister-in-law Amanda Roberts said her wish was to eliminate the statute of limitations.

"No more laws that treat survivors as though time can erase harm," Roberts said, before adding: "Pass Virginia's Law."

Jeffrey Epstein

United States

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