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Lutnick downplayed contact with Epstein in House Oversight interview, transcript shows

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Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick departs a closed interview with the House Oversight ...



Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick downplayed three in-person encounters he said he had with Jeffrey Epstein over the years in a closed-door interview last week with the House Oversight Committee that his interactions with the convicted late sex offender were “nonexistent,” according to a [transcript released Thursday](#).

The comments came during a voluntary interview Lutnick gave to congressional investigators last week following revelations that his contact with Epstein extended years beyond what he initially claimed in public.

In his lifetime, Lutnick testified that he interacted with Epstein in 2005, 2011 and, perhaps most controversially, at a [2012 lunch on a private island](#). Those later contacts, which were revealed in files released by the Justice Department, undercut his prior assertion that

ties with Epstein in 2005, even though Lutnick tried to argue his previous statement still holds. Epstein had pleaded guilty to s 2008.

“To the best of my recollection, those were the only three occasions in which I interacted with Epstein in person. Each and ev meaningless and inconsequential. I had no personal or professional relationship with this individual, despite the proximity o addresses. Further, at no time during these limited interactions did I witness any conduct, let alone the type of illegal conduct have since become aware,” Lutnick testified.

Even though Lutnick appeared voluntarily, he was reminded at the beginning of the interview that it is a crime to lie to Congr release of Lutnick’s transcript by the Republican-led Oversight Committee is part of the panel’s bipartisan investigation into E orbit and how the Justice Department handled the allegations of sexual abuse against him.

The transcript offered one of Lutnick’s most robust accounts to date of how he met and dealt with Epstein over the years, but satisfy critics who have accused him of covering up ties to the convicted sex offender. After his testimony last week, Democrat committee said he still had more to explain, and two suggested he should resign if he couldn’t provide a more thorough expla and Epstein’s interactions.

A Commerce spokesperson said the secretary answered “nearly 400 questions” during his testimony, where “he explained rep three encounters do not constitute a relationship.”

“The committee adjourned without identifying any evidence to the contrary,” the spokesperson said in a statement.

Lutnick testified that in 2005, he and his wife were invited over to Epstein’s house for coffee shortly after they moved into a n townhouse in New York. During that meeting, Lutnick said Epstein made a “crude” remark that prompted him and his wife to Lutnick said.

“I asked him why he had a massage table in the middle of his house,” Lutnick said, pointing out that it was the best of his reco a conversation that occurred 21 years ago. “And I said, ‘How often do you have a massage?’ And he said – my best recollection ‘Every day and the right kind of massage.’ And he said it to me, and my wife is standing next to me, and we looked at each oth left.”

Lutnick told committee investigators that he interpreted Epstein’s comment to mean that his massages “would become in sor in nature,” and he described Epstein’s comment as “inappropriate,” “gross” and “off-putting.”

Upon leaving Epstein’s townhouse after the 10- to 15-minute encounter, Lutnick said that he and his wife spoke about how he create a relationship with Epstein.

“Immediately following that brief initial meeting, as we walked back to our home, my wife and I discussed the encounter and clear lack of boundaries, I would never establish a personal or professional relationship with him. And that is exactly what I c testified.

Lutnick had similarly told the New York Post in a podcast interview in October 2025 that he and his wife decided to cut off coi Epstein after that meeting in 2005. But the Epstein files released by the Justice Department revealed that Lutnick and Epstein two more interactions after that, including a trip Lutnick took with his family to Epstein’s island. Lutnick testified he wasn’t si whether” he knew about Epstein’s arrest in 2006.

The secretary backtracked several comments he made during that podcast appearance last fall, including theories that Epstein what took place in his massage room and that he was the “greatest blackmailer ever.”

Lutnick insisted in his testimony that his views were “speculating for a podcast,” and that his theories about blackmail were based on Epstein’s wealth.

Asked by California Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna, who co-sponsored the Epstein files transparency law, why his views have changed since his podcast appearance, Lutnick said, “Because there have been people from the administration who have all of the details with them, so, and I credit what they’ve said.”

Later in his testimony, Virginia Democratic Rep. James Walkinshaw asked Lutnick to clarify who from the administration he spoke to before changing his mind about whether Epstein blackmailed anyone.

“It was just public comments from administration officials,” Lutnick said, adding, “That’s my best recollection was I learned it from public comments.”

The files also contained email correspondence and calendar invites for phone calls, and evidence that Epstein and Lutnick at one point were invested in the same business venture.

Lutnick testified, though, he did not know that the two were both invested in the same company until the Epstein files were released, although he emailed with Epstein in 2018 about the prospects of that company. Lutnick said he didn’t know why Epstein would be emailing him about the company, but noted its existence was public knowledge because the company was trying to “get attention.”

“Producing revenue finally. This is their year. Next 12 months they need to become economically self-sufficient,” Lutnick confessed in an email he wrote to Epstein.

In late 2012, Lutnick testified that Epstein’s staff “inexplicably” contacted his office about his family’s planned holiday travels to the Caribbean, calling the outreach “unsettling.”

“I still have no idea how his staff discovered my family’s vacation plans or why they pursued arranging a visit with me,” Lutnick testified.

But Lutnick nonetheless ended up bringing his wife and children, as well as another family and nannies, to have lunch with Epstein on the island. Lutnick called the encounter “brief, meaningless, and inconsequential.” Asked about a nanny that he employed sending Epstein a message, he said, “I have no knowledge about that at all.”

Lutnick testified that he never went inside any building, never saw any young women or girls on the island, and did not know of him on a cliff of the island with Epstein existed until the Department of Justice released the Epstein files.

Lutnick also detailed to committee investigators a 2011 encounter where he said he briefly met with Epstein in his hallway to discuss scaffolding and construction impacting their neighboring properties.

“My best recollection is: I rang the bell, sat in his foyer with my dog, waited for him to come down, heard what he had to say, and as I recall, it was about scaffolding. It was meaningless and inconsequential,” Lutnick testified, adding that his wife waited outside with their other dog.

Lutnick said he met Epstein’s co-conspirator Ghislaine Maxwell at a Rockefeller Institute fundraiser in New York City, describing the conversation with her as “meaningless and inconsequential.”

Lutnick is the highest-ranking Trump administration official prominently named in the Epstein files — outside of the president himself — and his appearance behind closed doors marked an extremely rare occurrence of a sitting Cabinet official testifying in a congressional probe. It underscores that the Epstein scandal still hangs over President Donald Trump and his administration, despite the president’s repeated efforts to move on from it.

But the White House has so far expressed confidence in Lutnick, despite calls for his resignation. When asked previously whe commerce secretary’s job is safe, a White House official told CNN, “Howard’s great” and there are “no planned changes at all” within the administration.

But the headache for the Trump administration won’t end with Lutnick’s appearance. The Republican-led panel is expected to former Attorney General Pam Bondi later this month about her role in overseeing the release of the Epstein case files.

This story has been updated with additional details.



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