

Republican rage after Trump's backflips on Clinton, climate



Donald Trump, left, and New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jnr at the newspaper's offices. AAP, 12:00AM November 24, 2016

WASHINGTON: Some of Donald Trump's strongest conservative supporters are angry at the US president-elect's backdown from his campaign pledge to pursue a prosecution of Hillary Clinton. Mr Trump, in an interview with The New York Times, took a more compassionate tone towards the Democrat than during his campaign, when he talked about a criminal investigation of the rival he dubbed "Crooked Hillary". Chants of "Lock her up" echoed throughout his campaign rallies, with Trump supporters angrily alleging corruption related to her use of a private email server while secretary of state and to foreign contributions received by the Clinton Foundation charity. "She went through a lot and suffered greatly in many different ways, and I am not looking to hurt them at all. The campaign was vicious," Mr Trump told the Times, adding that launching an investigation was "not something I feel very strongly about".

Conservatives who had revelled in the possibility of a Clinton prosecution were not pleased.

Breitbart News, the outlet once led by Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon, published a story under the headline: "Broken Promise: Trump 'Doesn't Wish to Pursue' Clinton email charges." Commentator Ann Coulter also balked at the news, tweeting: "Whoa! I thought we elected (Trump) president. Did we make him the FBI, & (US Department of Justice)? His job is to pick those guys, not do their jobs." She added no president should block "investigators from doing their jobs". Radio personality Rush Limbaugh asked the two million people who like his Facebook page for reaction and received more than 2000 often livid responses. "Donald J Trump, I am hearing that you will not be pursuing Hillary email scandal and pay-to-play. If that is the case, you just proved to me and America that laws are

for the poor people. That Lady Justice is not blind. That you are no different than the swamp you want to drain. If true, you have just spit in my face and so many others," Facebook user Donald Marks wrote.

Some Republicans backed the shift, including former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, a Trump adviser, who said yesterday that while he would have supported an investigation, Mr Trump had to make a "tough choice". "There is a tradition in American politics that after you win an election, you sort of put things behind you," Mr Giuliani told ABC News.

Mr Trump also signalled he would ease his stance on climate, saying he was "open-minded" on supporting global accords. He appeared to soften his pledge to pull the US out of accords such as last year's COP21 Paris Agreement, which binds countries to national pledges to reduce greenhouse emissions. "I'm looking at it very closely. I have an open mind to it," he told the Times. Campaigning ahead of November 8, Mr Trump repeatedly told crowds of rust belt and southern voters — factory workers, coalminers and oilmen among them — that he would tear up international climate agreements.

Mr Trump also said he was reconsidering his position favouring the authorisation of torturing detainees after sitting down with retired general James Mattis over the weekend to discuss naming him as secretary of defence.

The Republican tycoon had previously pledged to restore waterboarding and "far, far worse" in US detention centres, scorning President Barack Obama's ban on the practice. He told the Times he had been surprised to discover that such an uncompromising commander as General Mattis was opposed to allowing US personnel to torture suspects. "He said: 'I've never found it to be useful.'" Mr Trump said General Mattis advised building a rapport with detainees: "Give me a pack of cigarettes and a couple of beers and I'll do better." "I was very impressed by that answer," Mr Trump told the Times.

He said he would "love" to clinch a deal to end the intractable conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, but on the bloodshed in Syria he was more vague, saying "We have to end the craziness that's going on".

Mr Trump gushed in his admiration for Mr Obama, whom he will replace in the White House, telling the paper that despite the aggressive tone of his campaign, he had been honoured to meet the President.

The New York Times sit-down, which followed a hostile off-the-record clash with TV network chiefs a day earlier, appeared to represent a perhaps temporary truce with the media. Mr Trump has regularly insulted the "failing New York Times" in tweets, but distanced himself from threats to toughen libel laws and engaged cheerfully with the paper.

"I do read it. Unfortunately," Mr Trump admitted. "I'd live about 20 years longer if I didn't." Reuters, AFP