



Department of Justice

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AG
(202) 514-2007
TTY (866) 544-5309

ATTORNEY GENERAL JEFF SESSIONS PREPARED REMARKS TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you Chairman Burr and Ranking Member Warner for allowing me to publicly appear before the committee today.

I appreciate the Committee's critically important efforts to investigate Russian interference with our democratic process. Such interference can never be tolerated and I encourage every effort to get to the bottom of any such allegations.

As you know, the Deputy Attorney General has appointed a special counsel to investigate matters related to Russian interference in the 2016 election. I am here today to address several issues that have been specifically raised before this committee, and I appreciate the opportunity to respond to questions as fully as I am able to do so. But as I advised you, Mr. Chairman, and consistent with long-standing Department of Justice practice, I cannot and will not violate my duty to protect confidential communications with the President.

Now, let me address some issues directly: I did not have any private meetings nor do I recall any conversations with any Russian officials at the Mayflower Hotel. I did not attend any meetings at that event. Prior to the speech, I attended a reception with my staff that included at least two dozen people and President Trump. Though I do recall several conversations I had during that pre-speech reception, I do not have any recollection of meeting or talking to the Russian Ambassador or any other Russian officials. If any brief interaction occurred in passing with the Russian Ambassador during that reception, I do not remember it. After the speech, I was interviewed by the news media, which had gathered as I remember in a different room, and then I left the hotel.

But whether I ever attended a reception where the Russian Ambassador was also present is entirely beside the point of this investigation into Russian interference with the 2016 campaigns. Let me state this clearly: I have never met with or had any conversations with any Russians or any foreign officials concerning any type of interference with any campaign or election. Further, I have no knowledge of any such conversations by anyone connected to the Trump campaign. I was your colleague in this body for 20 years, and the suggestion that I

participated in any collusion or that I was aware of any collusion with the Russian government to hurt this country, which I have served with honor for over 35 years, or to undermine the integrity of our democratic process, is an appalling and detestable lie.

Relatedly, there is the assertion that I did not answer Senator Franken's question honestly at my confirmation hearing. That is false. This is how it happened. He asked me a rambling question that included dramatic, new allegations that the United States intelligence community had advised President-elect Trump that "there was a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump's surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian government." I was taken aback by these explosive allegations, which he said were being reported in breaking news that day. I wanted to refute immediately any suggestion that I was a part of such an activity. I replied, "Senator Franken, I'm not aware of any of those activities. I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I didn't have – did not have communications with the Russians, and I'm unable to comment on it."

That was the context in which I was asked the question, and in that context, my answer was a fair and correct response to the charge as I understood it. It simply did not occur to me to go further than the context of the question and list any conversations I may have had with Russians in routine situations, as I had with numerous other foreign officials.

Please hear me now. It was only in March of this year that a reporter asked my spokesperson whether I had ever met with any Russian officials. This was the first time that question had been posed. On the same day, we provided that reporter with the information related to the meeting I and my staff had held in my Senate office with Ambassador Kislyak, as well as the brief encounter in July after a speech that I had given during the convention in Cleveland, Ohio. I also provided the reporter a list of all 25 foreign ambassador meetings I had held during 2016. In addition, I provided supplemental testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee to explain this. I readily acknowledged these two meetings. Certainly nothing improper occurred.

Let me also explain clearly the circumstances of my recusal from the investigation into the Russian interference with the 2016 election. I was sworn in as Attorney General on Thursday, February 9th. The very next day, I met with career Department officials, including a senior ethics official, to discuss some things publicly reported in the press and that might have some bearing on the issue of recusal. From that point, February 10th, until I announced my formal recusal on March 2nd, I was never briefed on any investigative details and did not access information about the investigation; I received only the limited information that the Department's career officials determined was necessary to inform my recusal decision. As such, I have no knowledge about this investigation beyond what has been publicly reported, and I have taken no action with regard to any such investigation. On the date of my formal recusal, my Chief of Staff sent an email to the heads of the relevant departments, including by name to Director Comey of the FBI, to instruct them to inform their staffs of this recusal and to advise them not to brief me or involve me in any such matters. And in fact, they have not. Importantly, I recused myself not because of any asserted wrongdoing on my part during the campaign, but because a Department of Justice regulation, 28 CFR 45.2, required it. That regulation states, in

effect, that Department employees should not participate in investigations of a campaign if they have served as a campaign advisor.

The scope of my recusal, however, does not and cannot interfere with my ability to oversee the Department of Justice, including the FBI, which has an \$8 billion budget and 35,000 employees. I presented to the President my concerns, and those of Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, about the ongoing leadership issues at the FBI as stated in my letter recommending the removal of Mr. Comey along with the Deputy Attorney General's memorandum, which have been released publicly by the White House. It is a clear statement of my views. It is absurd, frankly, to suggest that a recusal from a single specific investigation would render an Attorney General unable to manage the leadership of the various Department of Justice law enforcement components that conduct thousands of investigations.

Finally, during his testimony, Mr. Comey discussed a conversation he and I had about a meeting Mr. Comey had with the President. I am happy to share with the committee my recollection of the conversation I had with Mr. Comey. Following a routine morning threat briefing, Mr. Comey spoke to me and my Chief of Staff. While he did not provide me with any of the substance of his conversation with the President, Mr. Comey expressed concern about the proper communications protocol with the White House and with the President. I responded to his comment by agreeing that the FBI and Department of Justice needed to be careful to follow Department policies regarding appropriate contacts with the White House. Mr. Comey had served in the Department of Justice for the better part of two decades, and I was confident that Mr. Comey understood and would abide by the Department's well-established rules governing any communications with the White House about ongoing investigations. My comments encouraged him to do just that and indeed, as I understand, he did. Our Department of Justice rules on proper communication between the Department and the White House have been in place for years. Mr. Comey well knew them, I thought, and assumed correctly that he complied with them.

I will finish with this. I recused myself from any investigation into the campaigns for President, but I did not recuse myself from defending my honor against scurrilous and false allegations. At all times throughout the course of the campaign, the confirmation process, and since becoming Attorney General, I have dedicated myself to the highest standards.

The people of this country expect an honest and transparent government and that is what we are giving them. This President wants to focus on the people of this country to ensure they are treated fairly and kept safe. The Trump agenda is to improve the lives of the American people. I know some have other agendas, but that is his agenda and it is one I share.

Importantly, as Attorney General I have a responsibility to enforce the laws of this Nation, to protect this country from its enemies, and to ensure the fair administration of justice. I intend to work every day with our fine team and the superb professionals in the Department of Justice to advance the important work we have to do. These false attacks, the innuendo, and the leaks, you can be sure, will not intimidate me. In fact, these events have only strengthened my resolve to fulfill my duty to reduce crime, and to support our federal, state, and local law enforcement officers who work our streets every day. Just last week, it was reported that

overdose deaths in this country are rising faster than ever recorded. The murder rate is up over 10 percent—the largest increase since 1968. Together, we are telling the gangs, the cartels, the fraudsters, and the terrorists—we are coming after you. Every one of our citizens, no matter who they are or where they live, has the right to be safe in their homes and communities. And I will not be deterred, and I will not allow this great Department to be deterred from its vital mission.

Thank you.

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