

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

March 2, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

Reports indicate that you communicated with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak while serving as a prominent member of President Trump's campaign team—conversations you failed to disclose during your confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.¹ During that hearing, I asked you, “if there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian government in the course of this campaign, what will you do?” You answered, “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 did not have communications with the Russians.” We now know that statement not to be true, and if it is determined that you lied under oath to the Committee and the American people, it is your responsibility to resign.

The American people deserve a full and fair accounting of the facts. I therefore request that you respond by the end of Friday, March 3, 2017, to the following two questions:

1. In the seven weeks following your confirmation hearing, why did you fail to clarify that you had indeed communicated on more than one occasion with the Russian Ambassador during the 2016 presidential campaign until the *Washington Post* exposed those interactions?
2. Describe in detail any and all communications between yourself and Russian officials and their associates during the presidential campaign of 2016, including but not limited to in-person conversations, phone calls, meetings, and electronic communications. Also include any such communications between members of your staff, including your Senate staff and any staff that assisted you during the campaign, and Russian officials and their associates.

The *Washington Post* has reported that you twice met with Russia's ambassador to the United States during the presidential campaign, meetings that were confirmed by Department of Justice

¹ Adam Entous, Ellen Nakashima, & Greg Miller, *Sessions met with Russian envoy twice last year, encounters he later did not disclose*, WASH. POST, Mar. 1, 2017, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sessions-spoke-twice-with-russian-ambassador-during-trumps-presidential-campaign-justice-officials-say/2017/03/01/77205eda-feac-11e6-99b4-9e613afeb09f_story.html.

officials.² In response, you issued a statement explaining that you “never met with any Russian officials to discuss issues of the campaign,” a claim made implausible by the circumstances in which each meeting took place. In July 2016, more than four months after endorsing then-candidate Trump, you delivered remarks during the Republican National Convention at an event hosted by the Heritage Foundation. Following your speech, you were approached by a small group of ambassadors, including Ambassador Kislyak. The ambassador later pulled you aside and engaged you in private conversation. The notion that this conversation, which took place during your party’s nominating convention, would not have touched upon issues related to the campaign strains credulity.

On September 8, 2016, you met privately with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak in your Senate office—a discussion your spokesperson characterized as a meeting taken in your capacity as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. However, despite ongoing public debate about Russia’s involvement in the hacking of American political organizations, an issue of national importance and a topic widely discussed at the time of your meeting, a Justice Department official is quoted as saying “[t]here’s just not strong recollection of what was said” during that exchange. However, a Justice Department spokesperson also claimed that the meeting was in no way related to the 2016 presidential election. The fact that these statements are at odds with one another only raises suspicion about the content of your conversations. Moreover, even if your private meeting with Ambassador Kislyak was conducted in your capacity as a member of the Armed Services Committee, I find it hard to believe that you would not have discussed Russia’s efforts to interfere in the election.

Russian interference in the most fundamental feature of our democracy is a matter of national security, and the American people deserve to know the truth about what transpired and the extent to which associates of the Trump campaign and Trump organization were involved. In order to get a full and fair accounting of the facts, the public must have confidence that the FBI’s investigation into these matters is not just thorough, but impartial. However, the questions raised by your previously undisclosed communications with the Russian ambassador cast doubt upon the impartiality of those investigations. Furthermore, the *Wall Street Journal* has reported that investigators have examined contacts between you and Russian officials as “part of a wide-ranging U.S. counterintelligence investigation into possible communications between members of Mr. Trump’s campaign team and Russian operatives.”³ Setting aside any political allegiances that might cloud your supervision of the probe, the public simply cannot have faith that a potential subject of the investigation would be capable of impartially overseeing the inquiry.

In light of these revelations, I call upon you to recuse yourself from any and all investigations related to Russian interference in our elections, including investigations into contacts between the Russian government and associates of President Trump. In order to assure the American people that this matter will be resolved with integrity and impartiality, the Department of Justice

² Department of Justice officials have also confirmed that on September 13, 2016, you spoke with Russian Ambassador Kislyak by phone from your Senate office. See Howard Koplowitz, *Jeff Sessions denies impropriety over Russian ambassador controversy*, ALABAMA MEDIA, Mar. 1, 2017, available at http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2017/03/jeff_sessions_denies_improprie.html.

³ Carol E. Lee, Christopher S. Stewart, Rob Barry, & Shane Harris, *Investigators Probed Jeff Sessions’ Contacts With Russian Officials*, WALL ST. J., Mar. 2, 2017, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/investigators-probed-jeff-sessions-contacts-with-russian-officials-1488424871>.

should appoint a special prosecutor to oversee the investigation. However, in recognition of the fact that the attorney general is responsible for appointing a special prosecutor, you must also recuse yourself from that responsibility. If it is determined that you lied to the Committee and the American people under oath during your confirmation hearing, it is incumbent upon you to resign from your position as attorney general.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Al Franken", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Al Franken
United States Senator