

Sessions says he ‘always told the truth’ in describing Russia contacts

By **Matt Zapotosky** and **Sari Horwitz** November 14 at 11:06 AM

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Tuesday that he has “always told the truth” in describing his knowledge of Trump campaign contacts with Russians — though he acknowledged he now recalls an interaction with a lower-level Trump adviser who has said he told Sessions about contacts who could help arrange a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

When asked previously about whether he believed surrogates from the Trump campaign had communications with the Russians, Sessions said, “I did not, and I’m not aware of anyone else that did, and I don’t believe it happened.”

Now, speaking before the House Judiciary Committee, Sessions said he recalled a March 2016 meeting with Trump campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos. Papadopoulos, in pleading guilty to lying to FBI agents, has admitted he told Trump and a group of other campaign officials, including Sessions, that he had contacts who could help arrange a meeting between Trump and Putin.

“I do now recall the March 2016 meeting at Trump Hotel that Mr. Papadopoulos attended, but I have no clear recollection of the details of what he said at that meeting,” Sessions said. “After reading his account, and to the best of my recollection, I believe that I wanted to make clear to him that he was not authorized to represent the campaign with the Russian government, or any other foreign government, for that matter. But I did not recall this event, which occurred 18 months before my testimony of a few weeks ago, and I would gladly have reported it had I remembered it because I pushed back against his suggestion that I thought may have been improper.”

Sessions clarified later that he recalled Papadopoulos made “some comment” about a Trump-Putin meeting, and he “pushed back.”

Democrats had vowed to press Sessions about his and other former Trump campaign aides’ dealings with Russians leading up to the 2016 election, and early in the hearing, they made good on that promise. In his opening statement, U.S. Rep. John

Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) went through Sessions's public statements on Russia-related matters, highlighting instances in which what Sessions said did not comport with other evidence.

"I hope the attorney general can provide some clarification on this problem in his remarks today," Conyers said.

In recent weeks, unsealed court documents have called into question the attorney general's previous testimony about his interactions with Russians, and his knowledge of others' interactions, when he was an official with the Trump campaign.

From Republicans and Democrats, Sessions also faced inquiries on a host of matters they want investigated — including alleged wrongdoing by the Clinton Foundation and the controversial sale of a uranium company to Russia.

On Monday, the attorney general sent a letter to House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) saying that he had directed senior federal prosecutors to explore at least some of the matters, then report back to him and his top deputy on whether any of them necessitated the appointment of a second special counsel. Sessions reiterated those points in his opening statement, adding "we will make such decisions without regard, hear me, without regard to politics, ideology, or bias."

Conyers sought to highlight that Trump had publicly pressed the Justice Department to investigate Clinton-related matters, noting, "What strikes me about these comments is the president's view that the criminal justice system serves him, and not the public."

Sessions, though, disputed that he had been inappropriately pushed to do anything.

"I have not been improperly influenced and would not be improperly influenced," he said.

Testimony before Congress has proved to be something of a thorn in Sessions's side. At his confirmation hearing to be attorney general, Sessions claimed he "did not have communications with the Russians" during the campaign. When The Washington Post later revealed he had twice spoken with Russia's ambassador to the United States, he revised his account, saying he had no meetings with Russians "to discuss issues of the campaign."

The Post later reported that Russia's ambassador to Washington told his superiors that he and Sessions discussed campaign-related matters, including policy issues important to Moscow. And at his latest appearance before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sessions seemed to shift his position again. That time, he said he conducted no "improper discussions with Russians at any time regarding a campaign or any other item facing this country," though he allowed it was possible in one of his conversations "some comment was made about what Trump's positions were."

In addition to the meeting with Papadopoulos, former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page testified before the House Intelligence Committee recently that he told Sessions of his plans to travel to Moscow. Sessions said he no memory of that interaction. Page has said that the interaction was brief and forgettable and that his trip was unconnected to his campaign work.


Sessions also revealed Tuesday that the Justice Department had 27 currently open leak investigations, compared to nine such probes in the latter years of the past administration. Sessions has vowed to crack down on disclosures of sensitive government information.

The [hearing](#) is the first time Sessions will testify before the House Judiciary Committee, and members are also likely to press the attorney general on all the ways he has reshaped the Justice Department in his nine months on the job.

 **Comments**

Matt Zapotosky covers the Justice Department for the Washington Post's National Security team.

 Follow @mattzap

Sari Horwitz covers the Justice Department and criminal justice issues nationwide for The Washington Post, where she has been a reporter for 30 years.  Follow @sarihorwitz

Share news tips with us confidentially

Do you have information the public should know? Here are some ways you can securely send information and documents to Post journalists.

[Learn more](#)