



Right Turn Opinion

Has Jeff Sessions got the world's worst memory, or what?

By Jennifer Rubin

Attorney General Jeff Sessions's defense for apparently misleading Congress about his knowledge of campaign contacts with Russians is that he has a bad memory. No, honestly. The man who now oversees the entire Justice Department might have heard about contacts with Russia, but no alarms went off, nothing was seared into memory and no action was taken. Even if you believe Sessions, his testimony is damning.

The Post reports:

When asked previously about whether he believed surrogates from the Trump campaign had communications with the Russians, Sessions said, speaking before the House Judiciary Committee. "I did not, and I'm not aware of anyone else that did, and I don't believe it happened."

Now, 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."

He doesn't remember, but if he does remember, he said to shut down contacts with Russians, but he didn't remember learning about contacts with Russians when previously testifying under oath. Got it? His routine — to take offense at being called a liar — is wearing thin.

Then there is the matter of a possible investigation of President Trump's political opponent, Hillary Clinton. Trump has repeatedly said she should be investigated. Now Sessions, who told members of Congress in writing he was having Justice Department figures look into the possibility of a special counsel to investigate the Clinton Foundation and the Uranium One deal, rejects the notion that his boss influenced the decision. Moreover, he refuses to say whether he would recuse himself because that would

denote there is an investigation. But didn't he already say in writing he had tasked Justice Department officials with looking into this? This seems to run afoul of his promise to recuse himself from matters concerning Clinton and the campaign. Former Office of Government Ethics chief Walter Shaub says it is "patently false" that Sessions cannot answer the recusal question.

The investigation into whether Sessions should appoint a special counsel itself poses a glaring conflict of interest.

Sessions subsequently said, "I would say 'looks like' is not enough basis to appoint a special counsel." That suggests he is, in fact, trying to contain the president. It nevertheless does not solve the question as to how he could be involved.

It may be that Sessions is struggling to deflect pressure for him to investigate Clinton. However, that would simply be evidence of the president's total lawlessness and would suggest that Sessions is not being candid when he denies pressure to investigate Clinton. The proper response to outside pressure to use the Justice Department as a political weapon against political opponents should be: Forget it. If that pressure continues, a responsible attorney general would either quit or force the president to fire him (as acting attorney general Sally Yates did when she refused to litigate the travel ban).

Finally, if Sessions's memory is so poor, one wonders how he can reliably answer questions that the special counsel will no doubt ask about the firing of former FBI director James B. Comey and Russian collusion. An attorney general who remembers nothing might escape implicating the president or others — but it also suggests he should never have been given the job.

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