

# U.S. House of Representatives

## Committee on the Judiciary

Washington, DC 20515-6216

One Hundred Fifteenth Congress

November 7, 2017

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

Dear Attorney General Sessions,

We understand that, more than nine months after the Senate confirmed you as U.S. Attorney General, you will appear before the House Committee on the Judiciary for an oversight hearing. In anticipation of our meeting—and in the hope that you will provide us with answers to our questions that are both responsive and complete—we write to direct your attention to the following matters.

First, as you know, court documents show that George Papadopoulos, a foreign policy advisor to the Trump campaign, communicated with several senior campaign officials about his outreach to the Russia government. The charging document for Mr. Papadopoulos states:

On or about March 31, 2016, defendant PAPADOPOULOS attended a “national security meeting” in Washington, D.C., with then-candidate Trump and other foreign policy advisors for the Campaign. When defendant PAPADOPOULOS introduced himself to the group, he stated, in sum and substance, that he had connections that could help arrange a meeting between then-candidate Trump and President Putin.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting in question was a meeting of the Trump campaign’s National Security Advisory Committee—a working group that you chaired. According to reports and a photograph of the event, you and President Trump were both present for his remarks.

Mr. Papadopoulos’s communication with the campaign about his work with Russia was not limited to this single event. Court documents show that he was in regular communication

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<sup>1</sup> *U.S. v. George Papadopoulos*, No. 17-CR-182 (RDM), (D.D.C. Oct. 5, 2017).

with a number of senior campaign officials—including Sam Clovis, Corey Lewandowski, Paul Manafort, and Richard Gates.<sup>2</sup> Those officials determined that the campaign’s interaction with the Russian government should continue to be delegated to “someone low level in the campaign so as not to send any signal.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, officials at the highest levels of the Trump campaign knew about Mr. Papadopoulos’s interactions with Russian officials on behalf of the campaign and hoped to hide those interactions from the public.

The record also shows that Mr. Papadopoulos was no mere “low level volunteer.”<sup>4</sup> In an interview with the *Washington Post*, then-candidate Trump listed him by name as one of five individuals advising him on foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> He took an active role in commenting to the foreign press on behalf of the Trump campaign.<sup>6</sup> At a campaign event just weeks before the Republican National Convention, he sat to your left at a table reserved for national security advisers.<sup>7</sup>

These facts appear to contradict your sworn testimony on several occasions.

At your confirmation hearing, Senator Al Franken asked: “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 responded: “**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, and I’m unable to comment on it”<sup>8</sup> It was soon shown that you had, in fact, met with Russian officials during the campaign.<sup>9</sup> We wonder if another aspect of your statement may also be inaccurate. You stated that you were “not aware” of any communications between the Trump campaign and the Russian government—but you ran the meeting in which Mr. Papadopoulos explained his intent to do exactly that.

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.* See also Rosalind S. Helderman, *Who’s who in the George Papadopoulos court documents*, WASH. POST, Oct. 30, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> President Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, Oct. 31, 2017, 8:16AM.

<sup>5</sup> *A transcript of Donald Trump’s meeting with The Washington Post editorial board*, WASH. POST, Mar. 21, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., David M. Weinberg, *The Donald’s Foreign Policy*, JERUSALEM POST, Apr. 7, 2016 (“Trump, says Papadopoulos, sees Russian President Vladimir Putin as a responsible actor and potential partner.”); Press Association, *David Cameron should “reach out and apologise” to Donald Trump, his advisor says*, TELEGRAPH, May 4, 2016 (“George Papadopoulos said it would be ‘wise’ for the Prime Minister to ‘reach out in a more positive manner’ to the Republican front-runner.”).

<sup>7</sup> Rosalind S. Helderman et al., *For ‘low level volunteer,’ Papadopoulos sought high profile as Trump adviser*, WASH. POST, Oct. 31, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> *Attorney General Nomination*, hearing before the S. Comm. on the Judiciary, Jan. 10, 2017 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> Adam Entous et al., *Sessions met with Russian envoy twice last year, encounters he later did not disclose*, Wash. Post, Mar. 1, 2017.

More recently, when Senator Patrick Leahy pressed you to clarify your earlier testimony, you gave three different answers: you had no “improper involvement” with Russian officials; you never personally “had a meeting with any Russian officials to discuss any kind of coordinating campaign efforts”; and you “cannot recall” whether or not you have had a discussion with Russian officials about emails stolen from the DNC.<sup>10</sup> Senator Franken then asked you directly: “You don’t believe that surrogates from the Trump campaign had communications with the Russians?”<sup>11</sup> You responded unequivocally: “**I did not—and I’m not aware of anyone else that did.** I don’t believe that happened.”<sup>12</sup>

Again, it is difficult to square this statement with the facts. If, as recent reports suggest, you rejected Mr. Papadopoulos’s suggestion that President Trump meet with Vladimir Putin at that March 31 meeting<sup>13</sup>—a fact you appear to have remembered only after Mr. Papadopoulos’s account was made public<sup>14</sup>—it seems likely that you were “aware” of communications between the Russian government and surrogates of the Trump campaign.

When you appear before our Committee, we intend to ask you about these inconsistencies. We are providing you with notice in advance because we expect you to respond. We will urge our Chairman to resort to compulsory process if you do not.

Second, to date, our members have sent more than forty letters to the Administration asking for information necessary to carry out our oversight of the Department of Justice. We have not yet received a single meaningful response to any of the letters—including the following, sent directly to the Department:

- February 3, 2017 – Ranking Members of the Judiciary, Homeland Security, and Foreign Affairs committees write to Acting Attorney General Dana Boente, requesting information about reports that President Trump intends to overhaul the Administration’s Countering Violent Extremism program in a manner that would target and single out Muslim Americans.
- February 14, 2017 – All Judiciary and Oversight committee Democrats write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions and FBI Director James Comey, calling for a briefing on Michael Flynn’s communications with Russian officials.

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<sup>10</sup> *Oversight of the U.S. Dept. of Justice*, hearing before the S. Comm. on the Judiciary, Oct. 18, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> Manu Raju and Jim Acosta, *Trump didn’t dismiss idea when foreign policy adviser suggested setting up Putin meeting*, CNN, Nov. 1, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Denis Slattery, *Sessions suddenly remembers he rejected Trump, Putin meeting idea*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS, Nov. 2, 2017.

- March 6, 2017 – All Judiciary Committee Democrats write to Acting Deputy Attorney General Dana J. Boente and White House Counsel Don McGahn II, asking the Department of Justice to address the accuracy of assertions made by President Trump accusing President Obama of wiretapping his phones prior to the election.
- March 16, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers, together with Representatives Nadler, Jackson Lee, and Jeffries, write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions about his decision to fire all 46 sitting United States Attorneys without warning.
- March 22, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers and Representative Richmond write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions highlighting issues affecting the black community.
- March 31, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers, together with Representatives Lieu and Jeffries, write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions asking him to clarify the scope of his recusal from any investigation of the Trump campaign.
- April 14, 2017 – Several members, including Representatives Nadler, Lieu, and Raskin, write to FBI Director James Comey and National Background Investigations Bureau Director Charles Phalen, asking for Jared Kushner’s security clearance to be suspended.
- May 9, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers and each of the subcommittee ranking members call on the Department of Justice and the FBI to preserve all Russia investigation documents and materials related to the firing of FBI Director James Comey.
- May 12, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers and Ranking Member Elijah Cummings of the House Committee on Oversight & Government Reform write to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein about the Attorney General’s recusal and his participation in the decision to remove FBI Director James Comey.
- June 12, 2017 – All Judiciary Committee Democrats write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions with questions about former FBI Director Comey’s congressional testimony and the Attorney General’s compliance with the terms of his recusal.
- July 6, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers, Representative Cicilline, and several other members write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions about the rights of working people to collectively hold their employers accountable for wage theft, employment discrimination, and other unlawful workplace conduct.
- July 12, 2017 – All Judiciary Committee Democrats write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions requesting information about his decision to abruptly settle *United States v*

*Prevezon Holdings Ltd*, a money laundering case concerning Russian sanctions, New York real estate holdings, and Natalia Veselnitskaya, the Kremlin-linked lawyer who met with Donald Trump, Jr. in 2016.

- August 4, 2017 – Ranking Member Conyers and Representative Jim Sensenbrenner write to Attorney General Jeff Sessions to express concerns and objections to his proposal to expand the Department of Justice's civil asset forfeiture program.

The Department's inability to respond to these letters on a timely basis is unacceptable. We expect a prompt response to every reasonable oversight request—whether or not Chairman Goodlatte has signed his name to the inquiry. At our hearing, we intend to ask you both about the matters described in these letters and about your decision to ignore the letters themselves.

Sincerely,

John Conyers Jr.

Jerold Nadler

Steve Cohen

Ted W. Cruz

Barbara Lee

Mark Johnson

Aed Deutch

Zoe Lofgren

Darrel N. Isselmore

Jamie Raskin

Jim Gray

Karen Bass

John 2 Q

Jim Gualtieri

Mark G...

Pramila Jayapal

Sheila Jackson Lee

cc: Bob Goodlatte, Chairman, House Judiciary Committee