

Justice Dept: Sessions spoke with Russian ambassador in 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Jeff Sessions had two conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States during the presidential campaign season last year, contact likely to fuel calls for him to recuse himself from a Justice Department investigation into Russian interference in the election.

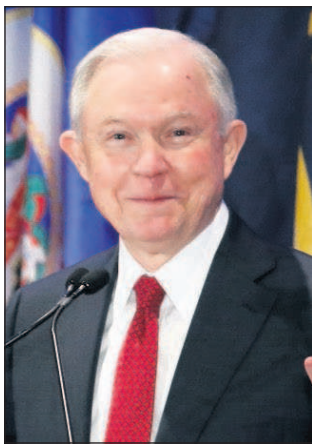
Sessions, an early supporter of President Donald Trump and a policy adviser to the Republican candidate, did not disclose those communications at his confirmation hearing in January when asked whether “anyone affiliated” with the campaign had contact with the Russians.

Justice Department spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores said Wednesday night that “there was absolutely nothing misleading about his answer.”

That answer did not satisfy Democrats demanding his recusal from an ongoing federal investigation. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, accused Sessions of “lying under oath” and demanded that he resign.

Sessions had more than 25 conversations with foreign ambassadors in his role as a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and had two separate interactions with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, the department said.

One was a visit in the fall, Flores said, and the other occurred in a group setting following a Heritage Foun-



Sessions

ation speech that Sessions gave during the summer, when several ambassadors — including the Russian ambassador — approached Sessions after the talk.

Revelations of the contact, first reported by The Washington Post, triggered calls from members of Congress for Sessions to back out of any involvement in the FBI’s probe.

“If reports are accurate that Attorney General Sessions — a prominent surrogate for Donald Trump — met with Ambassador Kislyak during the campaign, and failed to disclose this fact during his confirmation, it is essential that he recuse himself from any role in the investigation of Trump campaign ties to the Russians,” said Rep. Adam Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee.

“This is not even a close call; it is a must,” he said.

At the confirmation hearing

in January, Sen. Al Franken of Minnesota alerted Sessions to allegations of contact between Russia and Trump aides during the 2016 election. He asked Sessions what he would do if there was evidence that anyone from the Trump campaign had been in touch with the Russian government during the campaign.

Sessions replied he was “unaware of those activities.”

Then he added: “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.”

Flores, the Justice Department spokeswoman, said that response was not misleading.

“He was asked during the hearing about communications between Russia and the Trump campaign — not about meetings he took as a senator and a member of the Armed Services Committee,” she said in a statement.

The White House did not immediately comment.

Franken, in a statement Wednesday night, said he was troubled that the new attorney general’s response to his question was “at best, misleading.” He said he planned to press Sessions on his contact with Russia.

“It’s clearer than ever now that the attorney general cannot, in good faith, oversee an investigation at the Department of Justice and the FBI of the Trump-Russia connection, and he must recuse himself immediately,” Franken said.

FBI tells White House staff to preserve Russia-related materials

By JULIE PACE and VIVIAN SALAMA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — White House lawyers have instructed the president’s aides to preserve materials that could be connected to Russian interference in the 2016 election and other related investigations, three administration officials said Wednesday.

The instructions, which were sent to White House staff on Tuesday, come after Senate Democrats last week asked the White House and law enforcement agencies to keep all materials involving contacts that Trump’s administration, campaign and transition team — or anyone acting on their behalf — have had with Russian government officials or their associates.

The Senate intelligence committee, which is investigating Russia’s role in the 2016 election, has also asked more than a dozen organizations, agencies and individuals to preserve relevant records.

The three administration officials who confirmed that White House staffers were instructed to comply did so on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly disclose the memo from White House counsel Don McGahn.

President Donald Trump has been dogged by questions about his

advisers’ ties to Russia since the campaign. Federal investigators have been looking into possible contacts between Trump advisers and Russia, while congressional committees are investigating Russia’s role in political hacking during the campaign.

The intelligence community has assessed that Russia’s hacking of Democratic groups and operatives was carried out to help Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

One official said McGahn’s memo instructs White House staff to preserve material from Trump’s time in office, and for those who worked on the campaign, relevant material from the election.

A Trump spokesman said the White House was “simply taking proactive steps” and called the accusations of nefarious ties between the president and Russia “false and politically motivated attacks.”

Congressional staffers have said they are not aware of any evidence that materials related to Russia are not being preserved. But Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said last week: “There is real concern that some in the administration may try to cover up its ties to Russia by deleting emails, texts and other records that could shine a light on those connections. These records are likely to

be the subject of executive branch as well as congressional investigations and must be preserved.”

Trump has denied having any knowledge that aides were in touch with Russian intelligence agents during the election, as reported by *The New York Times*. The White House has launched an aggressive effort to discredit the report, including enlisting GOP chairmen of the congressional intelligence committees to push back against it.

The involvement of North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr and California Rep. Devin Nunes has sparked calls — mostly from Democrats — for a special prosecutor to investigate Russia’s role in the election and possible ties to Trump.

The White House has acknowledged that Michael Flynn, Trump’s former national security adviser, misled top officials about the nature of his contacts with Russia’s ambassador to the U.S. Flynn initially told Vice President Mike Pence and other Trump advisers that he did not discuss sanctions with the envoy during the transition, though it was later revealed that he did.

The FBI interviewed Flynn about the contacts days after the inauguration. Trump fired Flynn after the discrepancies in his account were publicly revealed.

TOURNAMENT: Attracts around 10,000-16,000 people

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ensures all the LED lights in the scoreboard are working and checks the console that controls the game clock and buzzer. He does a microphone check. He also examines the backup console, available if the main one goes awry.

On Wednesday morning, Mitzberg looked around the gleaming empty gym with satisfaction. The next day, the bleachers would fill with spirited fans ready to cheer their teams to victory. The place was ready.

Elsewhere in the building, senior secretary Kathy Marshall checked her own list. The items are eclectic. Labor is needed to clean bleachers between games, empty garbages and clean bathrooms. Big construction lights, loaned by the Wildhorse Resort & Casino, needed to be picked up and placed in a bus parking area. And so on.

“Ninety-nine percent of what I do happens pre-tournament,” Marshall said.

Across town at the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, the organizational machine was going full blast. The chamber, as the lead organization that contracts with the OSAA for support services, must make sure no “i” is left undotted. The responsibility includes volunteers, tickets, security, food for the hospitality room and a myriad of other details. It’s an endless to-do list.

Underneath that umbrella are other organizations. Altrusa International of Pendleton handles ticket sales. Main Street Cowboys and local Veterans of Foreign Wars members check tickets,

stamp hands and shoo fans away from crowded doorways and the playing floor. Business owners are encouraged to put welcoming messages on their reader boards or agree to support one of the teams by dressing up one of the business’ front windows with team colors, photo and an encouraging message.

One pair of volunteers, Jim Kinkead and Joyce Follis, make sure every team has its own personal host to take care of players’ needs.

“It runs the gamut as to what the hosts do,” said Pendleton Chamber Director Gail Nelson. “Some gather up the uniforms and take them home to wash. They bring snacks. They wear team colors.”

All told, volunteers number almost 300, Nelson estimated.

Keeping the fans’ stomachs full is the challenge for Patty Fairbank, owner of Outwest Catering. The concessionaire runs the convention center’s snack bar. She anticipates selling maybe 1,200 hot dogs and 600 hamburgers and a whole mess of popcorn, soda and nachos. She’s secured most of what she needs and is steeling herself for three busy days of waiting on hungry fans.

“We go in about 8:30 in the morning and close the concession stand about 10 at night,” West said.

At Pendleton High School, where some of the games will be played, Athletic Director Troy Jerome had to figure out the logistics for running a tournament and a school simultaneously. On any normal school day, parking is tight, so how does he plan to fit in all those fans?

“It’s a challenge. But the kids and the staff are flexible and adaptable — everyone knows the tournament is important for Pendleton.”

— Troy Jerome, Pendleton High School athletic Director

“It’s a challenge,” he admitted. “But the kids and the staff are flexible and adaptable — everyone knows the tournament is important for Pendleton.”

To clear out extra parking places nearest the PHS gym, staff members will park on the grass near the student parking lot on the east side of the campus. Also, physical education classes will meet in regular classrooms or at the track, since the gym won’t be available.

The tournament generally attracts between 10,000 and 16,000 people, depending on the number of local teams, and fills Pendleton hotels.

Most of the thousands of fans who visit Pendleton this week won’t recognize the depth of planning necessary to pull off the event — and that’s fine. Preferable, maybe. If they enjoy themselves enough, they’ll be back for more, Nelson said.

The to-do list is done. Time to play some ball.

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READ: One of the highlights is a school-wide parade

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School, and is now holding family read-ins. The first Friday of each month, families are encouraged to come in the mornings and read with their students.

Tamie Watkins, a Title I teacher at West Park, said one of the most important things teachers can do to encourage literacy is to give children books of their own, as many don’t have them in their homes.

“If the kids meet their AR (reading) goals, they get to choose a book to keep,” Watkins said. “Books seem to be a very good incentive.”

Rick Cotterell, the principal of McNary Heights Elementary School in Umatilla, said the students have special dress-up days for the entire week, and one of the highlights is a school-wide parade in which each class makes a float based on a book they like. The school also has guest readers in classes throughout the week.

“Each day there’s an emphasis on reading, and at lunch, the kids answer comprehension questions and can win prizes,” he said. “It’s so much fun for the kids.”

Cotterell said McNary Heights is below the state average in literacy rates, with more than 60 percent of the student population as English Language Learners. One of their goals, he said, is to align the intervention process across grade levels, so kids don’t have to adjust to a new program each year.

Headings said compared to other schools with challenging populations — high poverty, high ELL populations — West Park is above average. But compared to the entire state, Headings estimated the school is at or below the average literacy rate.

Watkins said one of the new programs she is using this year seems to be having some success. The program, called Fast ForWord, uses repetition to help kids understand new concepts and words.

“Kids need, on average, 14 to 30-something repetitions to understand a new concept,” he said. “For kids who struggle with reading, that’s not enough. With the new program, they get hundreds or thousands of repetitions of the same sound,” she said. “We’re seeing really nice gains with kids who’ve struggled in the past.”

TESTING: ‘Only samples which were analyzed to contain lead were from the area of the bullet trap of the former firing range’

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students, coaches, fans and volunteers that patronize the state basketball 2A tournament.

The lead testing was spurred by a December report in *The Oregonian* that investigated elevated lead levels in Oregon National Guard armories across the state.

As a facility that was converted from a National Guard army in 1990, *The Oregonian* conducted a test that showed that six out of the 13 samples a reporter collected tested positive for lead, most of them in a basement storage area where a firing range used to be located.

After *The Oregonian* published its story, city manager Robb Corbett ordered an additional round of testing conducted by a professional service.

The city signed a contract with Paulsen Environmental Consulting of Vale, which conducted tests on Dec. 7 and Dec. 19 and sent the samples to QuanTEM Laboratories of Oklahoma City.

Paulsen conducted air sampling Dec. 19, collecting samples in the basement, the entrance lobby, the drill floor, Room 6, a corridor near the kitchen and the Happy Canyon bar.

Those results ranged from 7.45

More online

For a full copy of the lead testing results visit eastoregonian.com

micrograms per cubic meter of air and 7.79, all below the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration 30-microgram action level.

The results Pendleton received from the Dec. 7 wipe test was more mixed.

There is no governmental standard for a wipe test conducted at a public facility’s basement or storage area, so Paulsen compared it to standards set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for housing where children seven and younger may reside. Lead is a neurotoxin that can cause brain damage, especially with young children.

A total of eight samples were collected, more than half from the basement.

“The only samples which were analyzed to contain lead were from the area of the bullet trap of the former firing range in the north area of the basement of the building,” the Paulsen reports states. “The floor wipe in the center path is slightly above the floor limit for children in a housing situation.

The floor wipe at the bullet trap line is approximately 1.5 times higher than the floor limit for children in a housing situation. The sample collected from the I-beam is fairly high.”

Paulsen suggested that the city move any items out of the north end of the basement before “lead trained personnel” vacuum and clean the areas mentioned in the report. An additional test will need to be conducted to determine whether the cleaning was effective.

Graham said he was surprised that there were still some positive samples given that the National Guard cleaned the facility before it moved out.

Despite some of the results, Graham said the basement shouldn’t affect the convention center’s operations.

“The fact is that no one lives in the basement or has an office down there,” he said.

Graham said there isn’t yet a timetable for when the high-lead areas will be cleaned.

Although he has a quote from a company qualified to clean lead, Graham said the city is also looking into collaborating with the National Guard to remove the neurotoxin.

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BENT: Only drug team north of Bend and east of Portland

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Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program. Roberts said BENT receives about \$110,000-\$130,000 a year to pay for personnel costs, drug buys and leases for vehicles.

The funding amount is based on the team’s quantifiable goals, Roberts said, such as the number of drug-trafficking organizations it plans to identify, disrupt or dismantle, or projections for the number of arrests and amounts of drugs it can take off the streets. Last year, Roberts said that came to about 100 pounds of hard drugs — meth, cocaine and heroin — alone.

The fewer members the team has, the harder it is to hit those marks. Lower marks means less funding. And the less effective the team is, the more traffickers are going to notice and take advantage. BENT is the only drug team north of

Bend and east of Portland to the Idaho border.

BENT also is a significant complement to the local major crimes team, Roberts added, and was the first group of police on the scene at the recent deadly standoff at the Motel 6 in Pendleton. Cut state police from BENT, and the response ability suffers as well.

Roberts said that’s the picture everyone needs to understand: State police are the sole source for much of Oregon’s law enforcement, especially so in rural areas. The agency provides the medical examiner’s office, the Law Enforcement Data Systems, background checks for gun buys, and the Forensic Services Division crime lab. That final service, he said, proved critical in cracking the 2013 Lukach Chang murder case.

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