

# Sessions steps aside from Russia probe

By ERIC TUCKER  
Associated Press



In this Jan. 10 photo, then-Attorney General-designate, Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., testifies on Capitol Hill at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

official described that sit-down as a brief courtesy meeting.

Flynn was fired last month for misleading Vice President Mike Pence about his contacts with Kislyak.

The Trump team's account of Flynn's contacts with the ambassador has changed several times. The White House did not disclose the in-person meeting, or Kushner's involvement, until Thursday.

Both the White House official and the person with knowledge of Page's discussion insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly disclose the meetings.

Trump has been trailed for months by questions about potential ties to Russia, and allegations of Russian efforts to interfere in the U.S. election to help him defeat Hillary Clinton. The new president and his campaign officials have blamed such contentions on Democratic sore losers and have heatedly denied any contact with Russians concerning the election.

While there is nothing necessarily nefarious or even unusual about a member of Congress meeting with a foreign ambassador, typically members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meet with foreign ambassadors, not Armed Services Committee lawmakers, such as Sessions, whose responsibility is oversight of the military and the Pentagon.

The latest development comes on the heels of what had been the high point of Trump's young presidency: a well-received address to Congress Tuesday

night that energized Republicans and appeared to wipe away some lawmakers' concerns about the administration's tumultuous start.

But Sessions faced a rising chorus of demands that he resolve the seeming contradiction between his two conversations in the summer and fall with Kislyak and his sworn statements to Congress in January, when he said he had not had communications with Russians during the campaign.

The Justice Department said he met with Kislyak in his role as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, not in his role as a Trump adviser with the campaign, and that led to his answers.

The attorney general, an early backer and key adviser for Trump's campaign, said he decided to recuse himself for investigations that are underway and others to come after his staff recommended he do so. Acting Deputy Attorney General Dana Boente will handle such matters for now.

Sessions added that his announcement "should not be interpreted as confirmation of the existence of any investigation."

Some Democrats called for Sessions not only to recuse himself but to resign.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who had accused Sessions of "lying under oath," repeated her call for his resignation after he recused himself. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said a special prosecutor should be appointed to examine whether the federal investigation

into Kremlin meddling — and into possible contacts between Trump associates and Russians — had been compromised by Sessions. Democrats also sought a criminal perjury investigation.

More than a half dozen Republican lawmakers, including some who consider themselves personally close to Sessions, had urged him to recuse himself from the probe. Sen. Tom Cole of Oklahoma said he didn't believe Sessions could have colluded with Russia, but "If there is an investigation, he probably shouldn't be the person leading it."

The Justice Department acknowledged two separate Sessions interactions with Kislyak, both coming after cybersecurity firms had concluded that Russian intelligence agencies were behind cyber-hacking of the Democratic National Committee.

The first occurred after a Heritage Foundation event during the Republican National Convention in July, when the department says a group of envoys — including the Russian ambassador — approached Sessions. The second was a September conversation, which the department likened to the more than 25 discussions Sessions had with foreign ambassadors last year as a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

But Sessions did not disclose his discussions with Kislyak at his Senate confirmation hearing in January when asked what he would do if "anyone affiliated" with the campaign had been in contact with officials of the Russian government.

Sessions said he knew of no such contacts. 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."

He answered "no" in a written questionnaire when asked about contacts regarding the election.

Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, said it was normal for Russian diplomats to meet with U.S. lawmakers. A spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, told AP that meetings with American political figures were part of the embassy's "everyday business."

# Pence used a private email account to conduct state business

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Mike Pence used a private email account to conduct public business as Indiana's governor, according to public records obtained by the Indianapolis Star.

The newspaper reported Thursday that emails provided through a public records request show that Pence communicated with advisers through his personal AOL account on homeland security matters and security at the governor's residence during his four years as governor.

The governor also faced email security issues. Pence's AOL account was subjected to a phishing scheme last spring, before he was chosen by Donald Trump to join the GOP presidential ticket. Pence's contacts were sent an email falsely claiming that the governor and his wife were stranded in the Philippines and needed money.

The governor moved to a different AOL account with additional security measures, Pence spokesman Marc Lotter said, but has since stopped using the new personal account since he was sworn-in as vice president.

Lotter said Pence "maintained a state email account and a personal email account" like previous governors in the state. At the end of his term Pence directed outside counsel to review all of his communications to ensure that state-related emails were transferred and properly archived by the state, the spokesman said.

As Trump's running mate, Pence frequently criticized rival Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server as President Barack Obama's secretary of state, accusing her of purposely keeping her emails out of public reach and shielding her from scrutiny.

Lotter said "the comparison is absurd" because Clinton had set up a private server in her home at the start of her tenure at the State Department and, unlike Clinton, Pence did not handle any classified material as Indiana's governor.

The newspaper reported that the office of Pence's successor, Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb, released more than 30 pages from Pence's AOL account, but declined to release an unspecified number of emails because they were considered confidential.

Public officials are not barred from using personal email accounts under Indiana law, but the law is interpreted to mean that any official business conducted on private email must be retained to comply with public record laws.

The state requires all records pertaining to state business to be retained and available for public information requests. Emails involving state email accounts are captured on the state's servers, but any emails that Pence may have sent from his AOL account to another private account would need to be retained.

At the end of his term, Pence hired the Indianapolis law firm of Barnes & Thornburg to conduct a review of all of his communications and that review is still ongoing, Lotter said. Any correspondence between Pence's AOL account and any aides using a state email account would have been automatically archived, he said.

# WOLF: Oregon is home to at least 110 known wolves

Continued from 1A

coyotes tug on a bait that releases a plunger that shoots sodium cyanide powder directly into their mouths. The animals usually die within one to five minutes.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife had recently collared the wolf, OR-48, on Feb. 10. At the time, the male weighed more than 100 pounds and was estimated to be just under 2 years old. It was not one of the pack's breeding wolves.

"The death of this wolf shows the risk involved when wolves are in areas where Wildlife Services conducts these types of operations," said Doug Cottam, ODFW wildlife division administrator. "This is a situation we take seriously, and we'll be working with Wildlife Services with the goal of preventing it from happening again."

ODFW spokesman Rick Hargrave said M-44s were prohibited in areas where wolves are known to be active while the predators were still listed on the state Endangered Species List. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission delisted wolves in 2016, though Hargrave said the department had spoken with Wildlife Services to keep the devices out of wolf territory.

"I just know we had discussions with them that we didn't want those devices in a known wolf area," Hargrave said. "In our minds, I think there was a general agreement."

"We're certainly going to go back, reiterate those concerns and find out where there was a communication breakdown," Hargrave added.

Dave Williams, state director for USDA Wildlife Services in Oregon, said they have begun an internal review of the incident. He said the agency "works hard to prevent the unintentional take of animals when addressing human-wildlife conflicts."

At last count, Oregon is home to at least 110 known wolves, though that total is likely much higher. Harsh winter weather has delayed ODFW's latest population report, which will be delivered to the Fish and Wildlife Commission at its meeting April 21 in Klamath Falls.

Contact George Plaven at [gplaven@eastoregonian.com](mailto:gplaven@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0825.

# PENDLETON: Two other musical acts will open for the band

Continued from 1A

sold at the inaugural Whisky Fest featuring Zac Brown Band and how they can increase it this year.

While Zac Brown Band is popular in its own right, the organizers sought a more contemporary pop sound that could attract people from across the Northwest.

Some of the Whisky Fest's marketing efforts will be focused on Portland, Seattle and Boise.

The Los Angeles-based band has been around since the mid-1990s, when they performed under the name Kara's Flowers.

Maroon 5 had changed their name by the time they released their breakout album, 2002's "Songs About Jane," which sold more than 10 million copies.

The band saw another surge in popularity when they released the single "Moves Like Jagger" in 2011, which coincided with

lead singer Adam Levine's turn as a judge on the NBC singing competition "The Voice."

Although the 17,000-seat Round-Up arena is in line with some of Maroon 5's typical venues, McAnally said hosting the band in small-town Pendleton will still be a test.

"This is a big year," he said. "This will prove if Pendleton, Oregon and the Round-Up arena can support (a concert this big)."

The organizers are also eager to prove they can limit the wait time for drinks, one of the main complaints that arose from last year's event.

To avoid long lines and bottlenecks, they are bringing in more beverage stations with more servers, spreading out their stations to avoid congestion and implementing a drink chip system to speed up transactions.

Pat Beard, the event recruiter for Travel Pendleton, was also

excited by Whisky Fest's potential.

"There are communities 10 times our size that would love to have an event like this," he said.

Beard anticipated Whisky Fest would bring 20,000 people to town, which could be matched the following weekend by Pendleton Bike Week attendees.

Beard said some hotels and restaurants were caught flatfooted during the back-to-back events last July. The Pendleton Chamber of Commerce is in contact with many of them so they're prepared for the rush of new customers.

These relatively new events are a change of pace for Pendleton's tourism industry, which used to mostly revolve around the Round-Up and the 2A boys basketball tournament. Beard said tourism is evolving to include a variety of events for different audiences.

Although Round-Up is still

king, Beard referenced a weekend in April when Pendleton will host the Walla Walla Kennel Club dog show, the Doolittle Raider Gala and a live taping of the Live Wire radio program.

Beard said new tourism can bring new challenges, like a strain on Pendleton's public safety services, but it's also adding steam to the idea that tourism is an increasingly important part of Pendleton's economy.

The Maroon 5 concert won't be the only performance on the bill. Corey said two other musical acts will open for the band, although they haven't been secured yet. This is in addition to a DJ who will spin music in between the live performances.

Tickets go on sale March 10 and range from \$70 for grandstand seats to \$175 for a premium seat package that includes a seat on the grass, a private entrance and early entry.

# DOWNTOWN: Discussed erecting signs to help visitors find parking

Continued from 1A

had shown five major challenges that stakeholders believe need addressed in order to help downtown thrive.

Those challenges are a shortage of retail and restaurants, a perceived lack of parking, a need for building upkeep and renovation, a need for beautification and a shortage of downtown events and activities.

Some of those problems are already being addressed in disparate ways by groups like the Hermiston Downtown District and the city. First Thursday events at the beginning of each month are now a fixture, for example, and shoppers drawn to Main Street businesses this Thursday were a sign that the effort is paying off.

Kathy Lowe was there for First Thursday, and said she sees signs that downtown is already being revitalized from where it was a few years ago.

"This is my first time, and I think it's great to kind of help getting to know downtown," she said.

She had just come from Two96 Main, a fairly new pop-up market

she hadn't known about before. She said she would definitely be back.

Although some individual efforts are bearing fruit, Tuesday's meeting was a chance to talk about a larger vision for downtown, and about how to leverage all the available resources to get there.

Sheri Stuart, Oregon Main Street Coordinator, kicked off the meeting with a presentation of ideas other communities had found success with. She said while downtown businesses may be small individually, as a collective group they are a major employer in town. The health of downtown is also something that large companies consider when choosing a community to build in.

"If downtown isn't clean and healthy and attractive and offering lots of services, they have other places they can be," she said.

Later, attendees broke into groups to discuss ways to make some of Stuart's suggestions work in Hermiston.

Umatilla County planning director Tamra Mabbott facilitated the restaurant and retail group, which was the most popular table of the night. She said they

discussed the need to create "synergy" through features like outdoor seating and sandwich boards, and events like a Food Cart Friday. They also came up with a list specific businesses the city should work to recruit downtown that would draw more people.

"We really need an ice cream shop," she said.

In the "parking problems" group, members discussed erecting wayfinding signs to help visitors easily find the parking lots available for free public use. They also discussed ways to encourage employees to park in under-utilized lots instead of taking up prime spots directly in front of other businesses.

While Hermiston's downtown hosts a few very large events each year, the events group discussed ways to use the city's planned festival street as an opportunity for smaller, more regular events like the farmer's market to draw people downtown.

Casi White of Simmons Insurance Group said she would bring her children downtown for something like a splash fountain or a children's museum.

On the beautification side, group

members discussed a marketing campaign for the city's bench and trash receptacle sponsorship program, which could result in more wrought-iron benches and trash receptacles downtown. They also identified 14 light poles that could be used for hanging flower baskets, and expressed a desire to create a gathering place in the large brick courtyard off Main Street by adding a water feature, benches and a Little Free Library.

The renovation and upkeep group talked about pursuing more effective façade grants and creating a window decorating contest.

Porricolo asked group members to exchange contact information, discuss who they could recruit to their action group and set a follow-up meeting. Community members can contact Porricolo at city hall if they want to get involved.

"It seems like there are some really great ideas to get things going in downtown and that's exciting," she said.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.