

Durbin, Senate Judiciary Democrats to Jeff Sessions: don't block Russia hack investigation

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), along with Senate Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and all committee Democrats

today called on Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), nominee for attorney general, to allow investigations of Russia hacking to proceed and to recuse himself from those proceedings.

The letter poses two questions to Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), the nominee to become attorney general:

1. “Will you commit not to impede or shut down any FBI or Justice Department investigation into Russian efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election?”
2. “Will you commit to recuse yourself from any FBI or Justice Department investigation into Russian efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election?”

Full text of the [letter](#) follows:

January 17, 2017

Dear Senator Sessions:

As the Committee considers your pending nomination to be Attorney General, we write to seek answers to two questions regarding an important development that occurred too late for the Committee to fully address it during your appearance before the Committee on January 10.

Specifically, on the evening of January 10, CNN reported that President Obama and President-elect Trump were briefed recently by the intelligence community about unconfirmed allegations that Russia may have “compromising personal and financial information about Mr. Trump.” The briefing reportedly also included unconfirmed allegations that there was “a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian government.” Senator Franken asked you during the hearing about this breaking news but you responded that you “have no information about this matter” and were “just not able to give you any comment on it at this time.” We understand that you may have been unaware of this news report at the time, which is why we would like to give you another opportunity to respond.

All Americans should agree that Russian interference in our nation’s democratic processes is a matter of grave national importance. As a result, some of us have called for an independent commission or a select committee of Congress to investigate. But at a minimum, these allegations must be fully investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department, especially in light of the recent assessment by

the intelligence community that Russian President Vladimir Putin personally ordered a campaign to influence the outcome of our presidential election in Donald Trump's favor.

Prior to the publication of the CNN report on January 10, Senator Whitehouse asked you, "Will the Department of Justice and the FBI under your administration be allowed to continue to investigate the Russian connection even if it leads to the Trump campaign and Trump interests and associates?" You answered, "if there are laws violated and they can be prosecuted, then, of course, you will have to handle that in an appropriate way." Your response did not answer whether, if confirmed as Attorney General, you would impede or shut down a Justice Department or FBI investigation into Russian efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election or allow the investigation to continue. The need for you to answer this question directly has only grown in light of the CNN report's alarming allegations. Accordingly, please answer the following question:

- 1. Will you commit not to impede or shut down any FBI or Justice Department investigation into Russian efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election?**

Additionally, Senator Durbin asked you prior to the publication of the CNN report whether you would recuse yourself from an FBI investigation into Russian involvement with the election and the Trump campaign. You responded that you "would review it and try to do the right thing as to whether or not it should stay within the jurisdiction of the Attorney General or not." In light of the CNN report's allegations, which you have now had time to review, please answer the following question:

- 1. Will you commit to recuse yourself from any FBI or Justice Department investigation into Russian efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election?**

Thank you for your attention to these important questions. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Mazie Hirono
United States Senator