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As Trump attacks attorney general, Democrats seek to channel all opposition behind anti-Russia campaign

The Trump administration descended deeper into crisis Thursday, with an unprecedented exchange of verbal attacks between the president and the attorney general he nominated 18 months ago, former Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama.

Trump vilified Sessions Wednesday in an interview with Fox News, claiming that Democratic Party holdovers “are very strong” in the Department of Justice and that “Jeff Sessions never took control.” He was responding to a question about Tuesday’s plea agreement with Michael Cohen, his former lawyer, and the conviction the same day of Paul Manafort, his former campaign manager, both in cases prosecuted by the Department of Justice.

Trump again denounced Sessions for recusing himself from any role in supervising the investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and possible collusion with Russia by the Trump campaign, the root cause of all his grievances against the attorney general. Sessions had little choice about the recusal, from the standpoint of traditional legal norms, since he had played a major role in the 2016 Trump campaign—he was Trump’s first Senate endorser, and for a long time the only one—and was therefore a potential target of the probe.

Sessions responded Thursday morning with an unusually pointed public statement, albeit prefaced by a declaration of loyalty to Trump’s policies. He wrote: “I took control of the

Department of Justice the day I was sworn in, which is why we have had unprecedented success at effectuating the President's agenda..."

He then added, in the closest thing to a rebuke that any cabinet secretary has given to Trump since he took office, "While I am Attorney General, the actions of the Department of Justice will not be improperly influenced by political considerations. I demand the highest standards, and where they are not met, I take action. However, no nation has a more talented, more dedicated group of law enforcement investigators and prosecutors than the United States."

This unusual exchange immediately touched off open discussion of the firing of Sessions by his former Senate Republican colleagues, who had previously urged Trump, after earlier anti-Sessions tweets, not to move against him. One possible successor to Sessions, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, flatly stated that Sessions would be removed after the November 6 election because he had "lost the confidence" of President Trump.

Trump has never followed up his Twitter diatribes against Sessions with action, in part, at least, because of Senate Republican opposition, and in part because firing Sessions would leave the Department of Justice headed for months by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who is the day-to-day supervisor of Special Counsel Robert Mueller and the Russia investigation. Rosenstein has been the target of frequent vilification from congressional Republicans and Trump himself for not closing down the Mueller probe.

The White House has hesitated to fire both Sessions and Rosenstein, or directly order the shutdown of the Mueller investigation, for fear that such a move would ignite a political firestorm that could lead to impeachment proceedings.

Trump openly discussed the possibility of impeachment for the first time Thursday, in the course of another interview with Fox News. Wallowing in self-delusion, he declared, "I don't know how you can impeach somebody who has done a great job."

He went on to address his real constituency, the financial oligarchy, saying, "I will tell you what, if I ever got impeached, I think the market would crash. I think everybody would be very poor because ... you would see numbers that you wouldn't believe, in reverse." In effect, Trump is warning his fellow billionaires that the destabilization of his government would threaten their financial interests.

While Trump has raised the possibility of impeachment, the Democrats sought to block any discussion of such action as part of the 2018 election campaign. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, in a conference call with the Democratic caucus Wednesday, emphasized this de facto gag order, which has been extremely effective. According to a

survey by 538.com of the websites of 811 Democratic challengers running for state and federal office in 2018, only one called for impeachment.

The Democrats want to focus all opposition to Trump on the Mueller investigation, that is, behind the faction of the military-intelligence apparatus that has spearheaded the anti-Russia campaign. They are using the anti-Russia campaign both to channel opposition to Trump behind a right-wing foreign policy agenda and to justify unprecedented attacks on free speech through the censorship of the Internet.

The two newspapers that are most aggressively pushing the anti-Russia campaign, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, published editorials appealing to congressional Republicans to take action against the president. The two editorials advanced identical arguments that Congress—and in particular the Republican leadership—should be spurred to action by the declaration by Michael Cohen, in the course of pleading guilty to two felony counts of violating campaign finance laws, that he had committed the crimes at the direction of Trump.

Under the headline, “It’s your move, Congress,” the *Post* argued that “if there is evidence of misconduct by the president, it must be disclosed to Congress and to the public...

“Congress also has the obligation to obtain this evidence, and gather its own. If congressional Republicans will not set aside partisan loyalties and start digging, voters will have reason to replace them in November.”

Under the headline, “Congress Do Your Job,” the *Times* called for congressional Republican leaders to stop blocking legislation that would protect the Mueller investigation from White House interference. The editorial concluded, “Republican lawmakers need to buck up, remind themselves of their constitutional responsibilities and erect some basic guardrails to ensure that — in a fit of rage, panic or mere pique — this president does not wake up one morning and decide to drive American democracy off a cliff.”

Both Trump and his opponents seek to keep their raging conflict entirely within the boundaries of the official political system, where it can be controlled and manipulated by the corporate ruling elite. The issues in the conflict revolve around foreign policy, particularly in relation to the policy of confronting Russia, both in Syria and Eastern Europe, adopted in the second term of the Obama administration.

The biggest fear of the Democratic Party is that the mounting political crisis in Washington will create the conditions in which an entirely different social force, the working class, will intervene and assert its own independent interests.

