

# Bill Kaplan: Trump and Ryan, pay attention to John Dean

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What have Trump and the GOP-led Congress done for regular folks? Nothing. Just hot air on saving jobs, but little to show; press releases masquerading as executive orders; wrapping the flag around the Oval Office to mask chicanery, and declining polls and bare-bones budget and health care outlines. It got much worse on Wednesday.

The Washington Post revealed that Attorney General Jeff Sessions lied to Congress at his Senate confirmation hearing. Minnesota Democratic Senator Al Franken had asked Sessions about contacts between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin. Sessions, the first senator to endorse Trump and chair of the Trump campaign national security advisory committee, said: "I did not have communications with the Russians". That was false. Sessions had spoken twice with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. First at the GOP convention, and in September in his senate office, the same time as the Russians sought to "help" Trump by "discrediting" Clinton.

Nothing wrong with talking to the Russians. However, one Trump official after another has not been straight with the American people. Fired national security adviser Michael Flynn was caught in secret contacts with the Kremlin during the 2016 campaign and after the election before Trump took office. Flynn lied to Vice President Pence about discussing sanctions imposed on Russia by President Obama. Then it was disclosed last week that Flynn and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, had met with Russia's ambassador in December. More press revelations had Trump campaign advisers Carter Page and J.D. Gordon talking with the Russian ambassador. What's going on?

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John Dean, former White House counsel to Nixon, who plead guilty for his role in covering up Watergate, tweeted: “Hey, Donald (Trump), a tip: Cover-ups don’t get easier as they proceed. Russia tie leaks drown your joint session speech (Tuesday) in less than 24 hrs”. What is Trump’s relationship to the Kremlin? Why are Trump’s henchmen secretive about contacts with the Russians? Did Trump and his entourage know about Kremlin interference in the U.S. presidential election?

Wisconsin GOP members of Congress have their heads in the sand. House Speaker Paul Ryan refused to call for Sessions to recuse himself from the Justice Department’s Russia-Trump campaign probe. And, Representative Sean Duffy had only excuses for Sessions, while Senator Ron Johnson does not “see the need for speed” in investigating these shenanigans. But Wisconsin Democratic members of Congress are speaking up.

Wisconsin Representatives Ron Kind, Gwen Moore and Mark Pocan tried unsuccessfully to have the House vote to require Trump to release his tax returns for review (Russian financial connections?). All Wisconsin GOP representatives were opposed. At the same time Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin showed continued leadership, calling for Sessions “to recuse himself from Justice Department investigations” of Kremlin-Trump connections. Moreover, Baldwin called for an independent special counsel to be put in charge. To Trump’s disapproval, Sessions recused himself. Still waiting for Sessions to put country above party and appoint a special counsel. Dean predicts “it will end in calamity” for the Trump presidency.

— *Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.*