



**Carmage Walls**  
**Commentary Prize**

**2019 Entry Form**

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**Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)**

These two editorials provide insight into the relationship between President Donald Trump and Jeff Sessions, who once served as attorney general. The editorials point out that Sessions angered Trump by trying to follow proper procedures.

# Sessions fired for doing right thing

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## THE ISSUE

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President Donald Trump has finally said “you’re fired” to one his earliest and most loyal supporters, Jeff Sessions, who is now out as attorney general because he insisted on doing the right thing by recusing himself from the investigation into the Trump campaign’s ties to Russia.

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Jeff Sessions’ tenure as attorney general has been anything but distinguished. In his 21 months on the job, Sessions stood in the way of meaningful criminal justice reform, stoked fears of rising crime in an era of historically low crime, threatened states that seek to apply a bit of federalism to their marijuana laws, and let local law enforcement agencies with histories of excessive force and racial discrimination know they’d have little to fear from his Justice Department.

But, ironically, Sessions was fired for doing the right thing. And there is no debate about his being fired. This was not a simple resignation. His letter begins, “Dear Mr. President, At your request, I am submitting my resignation.” It’s a passive-aggressive jab, far milder than the jabs President Donald Trump has lobbed his way, but it leaves no doubt Sessions did not leave of his own accord; Trump pushed him.

Thus ends arguably the most dysfunctional relationship between a president and a member of his administration since Andrew Jackson (Trump’s favorite predecessor) and Vice President John C. Calhoun.

The tension between Trump and Sessions has been present since almost Day 1 of Sessions taking office, stemming from Sessions recusing himself from overseeing Robert Mueller’s investigation into Trump’s presidential campaign and what if any illegal ties it might have had to agents of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s kleptocratic regime.

It must be stressed that Sessions’ decision to recuse himself was not optional; it was legally required. As a member of Trump’s campaign team, Sessions was involved in or at least close to many of the events under investigation. It would be a blatant conflict of interest to investigate allegations that amount to investigating himself.

That hasn’t mattered at all to Trump, who seems to have expected Sessions to shield him from investigation and has never forgiven him for leaving the investigation outside Trump’s ability to control it.

So, Sessions is gone, for doing the right thing, while other members of the Trump administration accused of wrongdoing that once would have resulted in a swift dismissal remain. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, for example, continues to maintain investments he is legally required to divest, and has even increased his portfolio.

Meanwhile, Sessions’ temporary replacement, Matthew Whitaker — whose appointment as acting attorney general is arguably unconstitutional, especially if one agrees with Justice Clarence Thomas’ rulings in similar cases — is on the record as a critic of Mueller’s investigation.

The House, now in Democratic hands, can issue all of the subpoenas it likes, but the Senate confirms presidential appointments, and there the Republican majority has grown. What will the Senate do to see that the rule of law prevails?

“If Jeff Sessions is fired, there will be holy hell to pay,” Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., once said. But that was more than a year ago, when Graham was still playing Igor to the now late Sen. John McCain’s Dr. Frankenstein. Now Graham has a new master, and golfing buddy — President Trump.

“I look forward to working with President @realDonaldTrump to find a confirmable, worthy successor so that we can start a new chapter at the Department of Justice and deal with both the opportunities and challenges our nation faces,” Graham tweeted the day of Sessions’ firing.

A Senate that has turned a blind eye to date likely will not suddenly see the light now.

# Sessions still Trump's punching bag

**THE ISSUE** President Donald Trump just can't let go of one decision he'd like to take back: his decision to make former Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions his attorney general.

**I**magine waking up so see your boss just told the entire world he wished he never hired you. Now imagine being U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, because it's the same thing.

On Wednesday morning, President Donald Trump kicked off his day, as he so often does, with a series of tweets. To no one's surprise, Trump is still upset Sessions recused himself from the Russia probe.

Trump began by quoting South Carolina Rep. Trey Gowdy, who had earlier told Fox News, "I think what the president is doing is expressing frustration that Attorney General Sessions should have shared these reasons for recusal before he took the job, not afterward. ... There are lots of really good lawyers in the country, he (Trump) could have picked somebody else."

To which Trump responded, "And I wish I did!"

The president is still suffering buyer's remorse after Sessions did what was legally required of him, which was to recuse himself from a case in which he, by virtue of having been part of Trump's presidential campaign, is involved. After Sessions stepped away, he was no longer in a position to do what Trump so desperately wants, which is to fire special counsel Robert Mueller.

Despite Trump's repeated claims that Mueller's investigation is a "witch hunt," Mueller has secured guilty pleas from former Trump campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos, former Trump National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, former Trump campaign aide Rick Gates, and others linked to them or to the 13 Russian nationals and three Russian companies Mueller has indicted. The thing about witch hunts is they don't typically find witches, but Mueller's probe already has found

corruption inside Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. That is not a witch hunt and it is not "fake news." It is fact, and the plea agreements are hard evidence.

Now, whether the corruption goes higher or stops where it is, and whether it involves simple graft and influence peddling or something more serious, such as collaboration with a foreign power, are unanswered questions. Mueller's investigation is seeking those answers.

Trump has done everything he can to confuse the issue, most recently claiming the FBI's investigation of the shady characters lurking on the periphery of his presidential campaign is the same as spying on him personally.

However, as Gowdy told CBS News on Wednesday, "I think the FBI, if they were at the table this morning, they would tell you that Russia was the target and Russia's intentions toward our country were the target. The fact that two people who were loosely connected to the Trump campaign may have been involved doesn't diminish the fact that Russia was the target and not the campaign."

The president didn't bother to tweet that remark.

Instead, unable to end Mueller's investigation, the president is left to try to discredit it before Mueller can even release his final report.

Meanwhile, why doesn't the man who turned "you're fired" into a catchphrase simply fire Sessions if he's so fed up with him? And why does Sessions put up with this rather than save some shred of dignity and resign?

Perhaps in America's most high-profile codependent relationship, there are answers not even a special counsel can find.