

Judiciary Committee Members Clash Over Questions at Confirmation Hearing

During a confirmation hearing for the Department of Justice's No. 2 law enforcement officer, two senators got into a verbal squabble over questions that weren't even directed at the nominee.

Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., had just finished chastising Deputy Attorney General-designate Rod Rosenstein when Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, interjected with an unusual amount of fire in his voice. Referring to the confirmation hearing of Rosenstein's likely boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Grassley unloaded on Franken, sparking a brief but fiery back-and-forth between the two senators.

"I think Senator Sessions should come back," Franken said. "I think he owes it to this committee to come back and to explain himself, because he also says in his letter, may I just ask—this will be very short.

"He says, 'I did not mention communications I had with the Russian ambassador over the years because the question did not ask about them.' I asked him what he would do as attorney general if it was true that members of the campaign had met with the Russians. So he says I did not mention communications I had with the Russian ambassador over the years because the question did not ask about them.

"He answered a question I didn't ask, and for him to put this in his letter as a response is insulting, and he should come back and explain himself, Mr. Chairman. I think he owes that to us.

"Because this appears to me like he was—and I have been, I've

bent over backward not to say that he lied. He needs to come back. I've bent over backward. I've given him the benefit of the doubt, but he has to come back."

Grassley was clearly not happy with the grandstanding by Franken, and he let the junior senator know it.

"I would like to comment on what Senator Franken just said, and I don't expect Senator Franken to act like I would towards our witnesses, but as I remember Senator Franken asking his question of Sessions, he referred to something that there had just been something come on CNN that obviously, and Franken said that Senator Sessions wouldn't know what it was and he was going to take that into consideration that it would have been all right for you to ask your question, and you probably should have given him a chance to get the information you had and reflect on it, and give an answer in writing," he said.

"Now the way I tend to, and you both of you know that I said this to you when you were in the privacy of my office," he added, referring to Rosenstein and Associate Attorney General-designate Rachel Brand. "If I was going to ask you a 'gotcha' question, I was going to tell you about it ahead of time and I consider what Senator Franken asked Sessions at that late moment that that story just come out is a gotcha question."

When Franken replied that he didn't believe his question was a "gotcha question," Grassley roared again: "It was, from the standpoint that he didn't know what you were asking about." As Franken tried to respond again, Grassley slammed his gavel down and ended the discussion. {eo}