



May 18, 2017

RE: UPDATED: Open to the Public the Now-Closed Senate Briefing by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on the Firing of the FBI Director and the President's Reported Attempt to End an FBI Investigation---Scheduled for 2:30 Today

Dear Senator:

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
WASHINGTON
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE
915 15th STREET, NW, 6TH FL
WASHINGTON, DC 20005
T/202.544.1681
F/202.546.0738
WWW.ACLU.ORG

FAIZ SHAKIR
DIRECTOR

NATIONAL OFFICE
125 BROAD STREET, 18TH FL.
NEW YORK, NY 10004-2400
T/212.549.2500

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS
SUSAN N. HERMAN
PRESIDENT

ANTHONY D. ROMERO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ROBERT REMAR
TREASURER

The American Civil Liberties Union strongly urges you to open to the public the now-closed Senate briefing by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, scheduled for today at 2:30 p.m. Mr. Rosenstein had a central role in President Donald Trump firing FBI Director James Comey, and until last night, was the Department of Justice official overseeing the investigation of Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election, alleged Trump campaign collusion with Russia, and any attempts to interfere with the investigation. The American people have just as much of a right as senators do to hear from Mr. Rosenstein on questions that go to the very heart of our democracy and our constitutional system of checks and balances.

The ACLU commends Mr. Rosenstein for the appointment of Robert Mueller as Special Counsel, but this appointment of an independent prosecutor in no way diminishes the urgent need for Congress to conduct full, fair—and transparent—oversight. The briefing with Mr. Rosenstein is an important moment for the Senate to make a commitment to openness with the American people.

There can be no greater need for transparency than in determining whether the President or his top officials and advisors colluded with a foreign government to interfere with an election, or attempted to influence, thwart, or end an ongoing investigation. The actions of the President have thrown the country into a constitutional crisis, and Mr. Rosenstein had an important role in facilitating one of those actions, namely, the firing of Mr. Comey only days after Mr. Comey briefed Mr. Rosenstein on the ramping up of the Russia/Trump FBI investigation.

This afternoon's closed-door briefing is critical to understanding the scope of the constitutional crisis. All Americans have the right to hear:

- Mr. Rosenstein's description of his own actions related to the firing of Mr. Comey;

- Mr. Rosenstein’s understanding of attempts made by President Trump and his staff and supporters to interfere with the investigation; and
- the scope of Mr. Sessions’ recusal, including whether Mr. Sessions is also recused from any investigation of Michael Flynn or Paul Manafort for any transactions with foreign governments; and
- the scope of Mr. Mueller’s authority, including whether he has sole authority over the investigation of Michael Flynn or Paul Manafort for any transactions with foreign governments.

Opening the doors to the Senate briefing will give all Americans a better opportunity to be informed citizens, ready to participate in the democratic process of figuring out how to resolve the constitutional crisis caused by the President and his administration and supporters. Even if you need to have an additional closed session for the purpose of discussing classified material that cannot be discussed in an open briefing, the Senate should hold as much of the briefing as possible in open—with the doors open and the cameras on.

There is absolutely no reason why the Senate should be blocking out all Americans and meeting solely behind closed doors with Mr. Rosenstein. The closest precedent to the current events was the Saturday Night Massacre during Watergate, and the resulting congressional inquiry, the Senate Watergate Committee, held exhaustive public hearings with high-level administration officials.

Even yesterday, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr invited Mr. Comey to testify before his committee in both *open* and closed session. If the Intelligence Committee is ready to hold an open hearing with the former FBI Director, surely the full Senate can open the doors and turn on the cameras for its briefing by the Deputy Attorney General, even if it has to hold the last portion of the hearing in private to discuss classified material that cannot be discussed in open session.

The ACLU strongly urges you to open the doors to the briefing and allow all Americans to be part of our democracy, especially in this moment of crisis. Thank you for your attention to this request, and we look forward to your response. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Faiz Shakir
National Political Director



Christopher Anders
Deputy Director