

Justice Department moves to fire at least 12 officials who investigated Trump

UPDATED JANUARY 28, 2025 · 11:28 AM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

By Ryan Lucas, Carrie Johnson

3-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT



The U.S. Department of Justice is seen on June 20, 2023 in Washington, D.C. At least 12 officials who worked with the special counsel Jack Smith to investigate President Trump have been fired from the department.

Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

The acting attorney general moved on Monday to fire several Justice Department officials who worked on the federal criminal investigations into President Trump, according to two department officials familiar with the matter.

In termination letters sent to more than a dozen officials, acting Attorney General James McHenry wrote that he did not believe they "could be trusted to faithfully implement the President's agenda because of their significant role in prosecuting the president," one of the officials said.

It was not immediately clear how many officials involved in the Trump investigations received termination notices. The news was first reported by Fox News.

The move comes the same day that Trump's acting U.S. attorney for Washington, D.C., Ed Martin, issued a memo announcing a "special project" to review the department's prosecutions of Jan. 6 Capitol rioters, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.



POLITICS

Trump gave pardons to hundreds of violent Jan. 6 rioters. Here's what they did

Martin instructed prosecutors to provide all information related to the use of a specific obstruction charge, including files, documents, emails, notes and other information. He also describes the use of the charge against rioters as a "great failure," according to the person who described the memo to NPR.

Last summer, the Supreme Court ruled that the Justice Department went too far in applying the obstruction charge against Jan. 6 defendants. But several lower court judges had previously blessed the DOJ's approach.

The moves are the latest in the administration's aggressive approach to the Justice Department since Trump returned to the White House seven days ago.

Trump shake-up, reassignments

Already, the department's acting leadership has reversed policies on a host of issues, including charging decisions and immigration enforcement, and brought a halt to other work, including in the civil rights and environment divisions.

The shakeup also extends to department personnel: several senior career officials have been reassigned from their areas of expertise to, in many cases, an immigration task force.

Two senior House Democrats, in a letter to McHenry, said the firing and reassignments of career DOJ officials contradict the president's pledge to maintain a "merit-based system" for government workers and are likely illegal.

"By removing them from their positions in this hasty and unprincipled way, you have very likely violated longstanding federal laws," wrote Jamie Raskin, Md., and Gerald Connolly, Va., the top Democrats on the House Judiciary and Oversight and Government Reform committees, respectively.

In a statement, the lawmakers added that these changes raise concerns "the Trump administration is intent on filling the ranks of the DOJ and FBI with career employees selected for their personal loyalty or political favors they have rendered to President Trump rather than their ability to provide essential law enforcement and intelligence services to the Department and to the nation."



Special counsel Jack Smith arrives to give remarks on the investigation into then former President Donald Trump on Aug. 1, 2023 in Washington, D.C. Trump was angered by Smith's investigations, which were ultimately dropped after Trump won the election.

Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Trump has lashed out for years at the Justice Department, accusing it of unfairly targeting him and his supporters in what he claims were politically motivated investigations.

He was particularly angry about the two investigations brought by special counsel Jack Smith. One case revolved around Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, and the other case stems from Trump's keeping of classified documents after he left office. Both cases were dropped after Trump won the election.



LAW

Special counsel Jack Smith says evidence against Trump was enough to convict him

Department officials, including former President Joe Biden's attorney general, Merrick Garland, have rejected the allegations of weaponizing the department. They point out that the department prosecuted prominent Democrats during Biden's term, including the president's son, Hunter, as well as two prominent Democratic members of Congress.

Still, Trump frequently talked on the campaign trail about seeking vengeance against his perceived enemies, including at the Justice Department.

His pick for attorney general, Pam Bondi, and his choice for FBI director, Kash Patel, have both talked about investigating the investigators.

justice department donald trump jack smith

More Stories From NPR



POLITICS

DOGE released data about federal contract savings. It doesn't add up



WORLD

China sees an opportunity as the U.S. cuts aid to groups around the world



NATIONAL

Military doctors prepare to deploy to Guantánamo for extended stay



MEDIA

These far-right media figures are getting center stage under Trump



POLITICS

NY Governor won't remove NYC Mayor Adams from office, another win for President Trump



POLITICS

Senate confirms Kash Patel, fierce critic of FBI, to head the bureau

Popular on NPR.org



D.C. PLANE AND HELICOPTER CRASH

NPR host Adrian Ma remembers his girlfriend who died in D.C. plane crash



INTERNATIONAL

Mexico warns the US not to 'invade our sovereignty' in fight against cartels



ECONOMY

IRS cuts over 6,000 jobs in the middle of tax season



POLICY-ISH

Republican proposals to cut Medicaid could be politically fraught



CULTURE

Kennedy Center evacuates due to bomb threat targeting Shen Yun



LAW

Why independent agencies were created to be independent

NPR Editors' Picks



CLIMATE

Exclusive: Trump administration drops work on stronger building codes for disasters



SPORTS

Everything to know about the MLB's ball-strike challenge system at spring training



POLITICS

Trump wants more power over agencies. Experts worry about campaign finance regulators



POLITICS

Sen. Mitch McConnell says he will not seek reelection in 2026



GOATS AND SODA

As the U.S. steps back from global health, what role will China play?



NATIONAL

Trump aims to cut benefits for those without legal status. Most already don't qualify

READ & LISTEN

Home

News

Culture

Music

Podcasts & Shows

CONNECT

Newsletters

Facebook

Instagram

Press

Public Editor

Corrections

Contact & Help

ABOUT NPR

Overview

Diversity

NPR Network

Accessibility

Ethics

Finances

GET INVOLVED

Support Public Radio

Sponsor NPR

NPR Careers

NPR Shop

NPR Events

NPR Extra

terms of use

privacy

your privacy choices

text only

© 2025 npr