

Trump abruptly axes FBI's Comey amid Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump abruptly fired FBI Director James Comey Tuesday, dramatically ousting the nation's top law enforcement official in the midst of an FBI investigation into whether Trump's campaign had ties to Russia's meddling in the election that sent him to the White House.

In a letter to Comey, Trump said the firing was necessary to restore "public trust and confidence" in the FBI. Comey has come under intense scrutiny in recent months for his public comments on an investigation into Democrat Hillary Clinton's email practices, including a pair of letters he sent to Congress on the matter in the closing days of last year's campaign.

Trump made no mention of Comey's role in the Clinton investigation, which she has blamed in part for the election result. But in announcing the firing, the White House circulated a scathing memo, written by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, criticizing Comey's handling of the Clinton probe, including the director's decision to hold a news conference announcing its findings and releasing "derogatory information" about Clinton.

Since Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from the bureau's Trump-Russia probe, Rosenstein, his deputy, has been in charge.

This is only the second firing of an FBI director in history. President Bill Clinton dismissed William Sessions amid allegations of ethical lapses in 1993.

Democrats slammed Trump's action, comparing it to President Richard Nixon's "Saturday Night Massacre" decision to fire the independent special prosecutor overseeing the Watergate investigation in 1973, which prompted the resignations of the Justice Department's top two officials.

"This is Nixonian," Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., declared on Twitter. "Outrageous," said Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, calling for Comey to immediately be summoned to testify to Congress about the status of the Trump-Russia investigation. Rep. Adam Schiff of California, top Democrat on the House intelligence committee, said the White House was "brazenly interfering" in the probe.

Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona said Congress must form a special committee to investigate



In this May 3 photo, then-FBI Director James Comey pauses as he testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, before a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing.

AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

Author of memo about Comey overseeing Russia-2016 probe

WASHINGTON (AP) — The author of a scathing memo that the White House used to justify the firing of FBI director James Comey is the same man overseeing a Justice Department investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein wrote a three-page rebuke of Comey's conduct in which Rosenstein said the FBI director had usurped the attorney general's authority last year when he announced that the FBI was closing its investigation of Hillary Clinton's use of a private email as secretary of state. Rosenstein added that Comey's behavior was "a textbook example of what federal prosecutors and agents are taught not to do."

Rosenstein, a veteran prosecutor, said the FBI was "unlikely to regain public and congressional trust until it has a director who understands the gravity of the mistakes" and promises not to repeat them.

Russia's interference in the election.

Democrats expressed deep skepticism about the stated reasons for Tuesday's firing, raising the prospect of a White House effort to stymie the investigations by the FBI and congressional panels.

Trump will now appoint Comey's successor. The White House said the search for a replacement was beginning immediately. Comey's deputy, Andrew McCabe, would presumably take over in the interim.

Trump has ridiculed the investi-

gations as a "hoax" and has denied that his campaign was involved in Russia's meddling. In his letter to Comey, he asserted that the FBI director had informed him "on three separate occasions that I am not under investigation."

Tuesday's stunning announcement came shortly after the FBI corrected aspects of Comey's sworn testimony on Capitol Hill last week. Comey told lawmakers that Huma Abedin, a top aide to Hillary Clinton, had sent "hundreds and thousands" of emails to her

President Donald Trump said he fired Comey in part based on the memo, titled "Restoring Public Confidence in the FBI."

But the sharply worded memo could add to concern among some Democrats about conflicts with the Russia probe. Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from any Trump-Russia investigation in March after the Justice Department acknowledged he had spoken twice with the Russian ambassador last year and had failed to disclose the contacts during his Senate confirmation process. Sessions said he had not tried to mislead anyone but could have been more careful in his answers. He later amended testimony.

That recusal handed authority for an investigation to an acting deputy, and then to Rosenstein once he was confirmed last month. Rosenstein was appointed by President George W. Bush and remained in the post for the entire Obama administration.

husband's laptop, including some with classified information.

On Tuesday, the FBI told the Senate Judiciary Committee that only "a small number" of the thousands of emails found on the laptop had been forwarded there while most had simply been backed up from electronic devices. Most of the email chains on the laptop containing classified information were not the result of forwarding, the FBI said.

Some lawmakers did welcome news of the dismissal.

"Given the recent controversies surrounding the director, I believe a fresh start will serve the FBI and the nation well," said Republican Lindsay Graham of South Carolina, chairman of a Senate Judiciary subcommittee investigating the Russian campaign interference.

Comedy, 56, was nominated by President Barack Obama for the FBI post in 2013 to a 10-year term, though that appointment does not ensure a director will serve the full term.

Praised frequently by both parties for his independence and integrity, Comey has spent three decades in law enforcement.

But his prominent role in the 2016 presidential campaign raised questions about his judgment and impartiality. Though the FBI did not recommend charges against Clinton for mishandling classified information, Comey was blisteringly critical of her decision to use a personal email account and private internet server during her four years as secretary of state.

Comedy strongly defended his decisions during the hearing last week. He said he was "mildly nauseous" at the thought of having swayed the election but also said he would do the same again.

Clinton has partially blamed her loss on Comey's disclosure to Congress less than two weeks before Election Day that the email investigation would be revisited. Comey later said the FBI, again, had found no reason to bring any charges.

Trump disagreed with Clinton's assessment, tweeting that Comey actually "was the best thing that ever happened to Hillary Clinton in that he gave her a free pass for many bad deeds!"

Clinton's advisers were stunned by Trump's decision Tuesday. Former campaign spokesman Brian Fallon said that while he believed Comey had "inflicted severe damage" on the FBI, "the timing and manner of this firing suggest that it is the product of Donald Trump feeling the heat on the ongoing Russia investigation and not a well thought out response to the inappropriate handling of the Clinton investigation."

Though Comey was well-liked within the bureau, his independent streak occasionally rankled the Obama administration, including his repeated contention that a spike in violent crime might be linked to police officer anxiety over public scrutiny.

Texas votes to give immigration lockups child care licenses

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas lawmakers are advancing a proposal to license family immigrant detention centers as child care providers.

The state Senate voted 20-11 Tuesday to give preliminary approval to a bill that would allow Texas to license two family lockdowns, despite a past state court ruling that such facilities do not meet minimum requirements to care for kids. The measure would enable detention facilities to hold families for prolonged stays, which advocates say could physically and psychologically harm children.

The bill needs a final Senate vote that could come as early as Wednesday before heading to the state House. Texas' legislative session ends May 29, so time is running short.

The private prison company GEO Group, which operates an 830-bed family facility south of San Antonio, lobbied Texas politicians to introduce the licensing bill, which could help its Karnes Residential Center remain open. That lockup, which mainly holds women and children seeking asylum from Central America, earns GEO \$55 million annually.

Trump OKs arms for Syrian Kurds, despite Turkish objections

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration announced Tuesday it will arm Syria's Kurdish fighters "as necessary" to recapture the key Islamic State group stronghold of Raqqa, despite intense opposition from NATO ally Turkey, which

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sees the Kurds as terrorists.

The decision is meant to accelerate the Raqqa operation but undermines the Turkish government's view that the Syrian Kurdish group known as the YPG is an extension of a Kurdish terrorist organization that operates in Turkey. Washington is eager to retake Raqqa, arguing that it is a haven for IS operatives to plan attacks on the West.

Dana W. White, the Pentagon's chief spokeswoman, said in

a written statement that President Donald Trump authorized the arms Monday. His approval gives the Pentagon the go-ahead to "equip Kurdish elements of the Syrian Democratic Forces as necessary to ensure a clear victory over ISIS" in Raqqa, said White, who was traveling with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in Europe.

The U.S. sees the Kurdish-led forces, or SDF, as its most effective partner against IS.

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