



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin  
**Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe listens on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, while testifying before a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on major threats facing the U.S.**

## Trump: I was going to fire that ‘showboat’ no matter what

WASHINGTON (AP) — Contradicting previous White House explanations, President Donald Trump declared Thursday he had planned to fire FBI Director James Comey all along, regardless of whether top Justice Department officials recommended the stunning step. His assertions came as Comey’s temporary replacement joined in, contradicting other administration statements on the snowballing controversy.

In an interview with NBC News, Trump also said he’d asked Comey point-blank if he was under investigation and was assured three times he was not. Trump showed no concern that the request might be viewed as interference in an active FBI probe into his 2016 campaign’s possible ties to Russia’s election meddling.

“I said, ‘If it’s possible, would you let me know am I under investigation?’ He said you are not under investigation,” Trump told NBC. He said the discussions happened in two phone calls and at a dinner in which Comey was asking to keep his job.

The White House initially cited a Justice Department memo criticizing Comey’s handling of last year’s investigation into Hillary Clinton’s emails as the impetus for Trump’s decision. But Trump on Thursday acknowledged for the first time that the Russia investigation — which he dismissed as a “made up story” — was also on his mind as he ousted the man overseeing the probe.

The shifting accounts of the decision to fire Comey, whom Trump derided as a “showboat” and “grandstander,” added to a mounting sense of uncertainty and chaos in the West Wing, as aides scrambled to get their stories straight and appease an angry president. Not even Vice President Mike Pence was spared the embarrassment of having told a version of events that was later discredited by Trump.

The White House’s explanations continued to crumble

throughout the day Thursday. On Capitol Hill, acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe strongly disputed the White House’s assertion that Comey had been fired in part because he had lost the confidence of the FBI’s rank-and-file.

“That is not accurate,” McCabe said. “Director Comey enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day.”

Unfazed, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders insisted she had heard from “countless” members of the FBI who welcomed the decision.

McCabe also pointed out the remarkable nature of Trump’s version of his conversations with Comey. McCabe told a Senate panel it was not “standard practice” to tell an individual whether they are or are not under investigation.

Previous presidents have made a public show of staying out of legal matters, so as not to appear to be injecting politics. Trump’s comments demonstrated his striking deviation from that practice.

The ousted director himself is said to be confident that his own version of events will come out, possibly in an appearance before Congress, according to an associate who has been in touch with him since his firing Tuesday.

The president was not kind to Comey Thursday, calling him names and saying he’d left the FBI in “virtual turmoil.” He said that while he received a scathing assessment of Comey’s performance from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on Monday, that memo was not a catalyst for his dramatic decision as the White House had said earlier.

“I was going to fire Comey,” Trump said. “Regardless of recommendation I was going to fire Comey.”

That’s far different from the White House’s initial account in the hours after Comey’s firing. Multiple officials, including Pence, said the president was acting at the behest of Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

## Report paints harrowing picture of Central America migration

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Migrants from Central America’s violence-plagued Northern Triangle region endure harrowing abuses while trying to make their way through Mexico toward the United States, a report from an international medical group said Thursday.

Doctors Without Borders, or MSF for its initials in French, called the situation a “humanitarian crisis” that demands the U.S. and Mexican governments do more to process applications for asylum and humanitarian visas.

It said the study was based on surveys and medical data from the last two years and documents “a pattern of violent displacement, persecution, sexual violence and forced repatriation akin to the conditions found in the deadliest armed conflicts in the world today.”

Among its findings:

- Almost 40 percent of those interviewed said they left home due to attacks, threats, extortion or attempts at forced recruitment by gangs in Central America. About 44 percent of the migrants had a relative who had died in the last two years due to violence, and that rose to 56 percent for those from El Salvador.

- Nearly 70 percent of those entering Mexico reported suffering violence during transit toward the United States, and nearly a third of women reported being sexually abused.

- Of the 166 female migrants treated by MSF for sexual violence, 60 percent had been raped and the rest were subjected to other kinds of assault such as forced nudity. Among 1,817 people treated for mental health issues, about 47 percent had experienced physical violence during transit.

## Trump launches commission to investigate voter fraud

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday launching a commission to review alleged voter fraud and voter suppression, building upon his unsubstantiated claims that millions of people voted illegally in the 2016 election.

The White House said the president’s “Advisory Commission on Election Integrity” would examine allegations of improper voting and fraudulent voter registration in states and across the nation. Vice President Mike Pence will chair the panel and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach will be vice chair of the commission, which will report back to Trump by 2018.



AP Photo/Fernando Llano  
**In this May 10 photo, Bolivarian National Guards shield themselves from a jar of fecal matter thrown at them by anti-government protesters in Caracas, Venezuela. Opponents of President Nicolas Maduro threw glass jars filled with fecal matter at security forces blocking them from marching to the Supreme Court to protest its decision to gut the opposition-controlled congress of its powers — a ruling that was quickly rescinded under a barrage of international criticism but that set off weeks of political unrest that have left some three dozens killed.**

Trump has alleged, without evidence, that 3 million to 5 million people voted illegally in his 2016 election against Democrat Hillary Clinton. He has vowed since the start of his administration to investigate voter fraud, a process that has been delayed for months.

Last November, Kobach said he supported Trump’s assertions that he would have won the popular vote if “millions” of people hadn’t voted illegally.

## Al-Qaida member who flipped and helped U.S. gets time served

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge decided to spare an admitted homegrown terrorist known as Bashir the American a long prison term on Thursday, agreeing he should instead receive a sentence of time served — about eight years in mostly solitary confinement — as credit for becoming a prized U.S. government cooperator.

Bryant Neal Vinas, 34, grew up in obscurity on Long Island before becoming a militant Muslim convert, relocating to an outlaw region of Pakistan and scheming with senior al-Qaida members on how best to attack the Long Island Rail Road.

“To say I’m remorseful would be an understatement,” Vinas, his face pale, said in a flat voice in federal court in Brooklyn before hearing his sentence.

Outside court, his lawyers said he was relieved and grateful.

Vinas, of Patchogue, had pleaded guilty in 2009 to charges he tried to kill American soldiers and provide support to al-Qaida before Pakistani authorities

captured him in 2008 and turned him over to the United States.

U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis ordered Vinas to remain jailed another 90 days while authorities assess his security needs as someone in likely danger for betraying the terror group and put him on probation for life. The judge also agreed with prosecutors that mental health treatment, vocational training and continued cooperation should be mandatory.

## More price hikes likely for government insurance markets

NEW YORK (AP) Early moves by insurers suggest that another round of price hikes and limited choices will greet insurance shoppers around the country when they start searching for next year’s coverage on the public markets established by the Affordable Care Act.

Insurance companies are still making decisions about whether to offer coverage for individuals next year on these markets, and price increase requests are only just starting to be revealed by state regulators. But in recent weeks big insurers like Aetna and Humana have been dropping out of markets or saying that they aren’t ready to commit. And regulators in Virginia and Maryland have reported early price hike requests ranging from just under 10 percent to more than 50 percent.

Increases like that will probably be seen in other states, too, as insurers set prices to account for uncertain support from a federal government led by a new president who wants to scrap and replace the law.

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