

# Special prosecutor abruptly named to probe Trump ties

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department abruptly appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller Wednesday night as a special counsel to lead a federal investigation into allegations that Donald Trump's campaign collaborated with Russia to sway the 2016 election that put him in the White House. Mueller will have sweeping powers and the authority to prosecute any crimes he uncovers.

The surprise announcement to hand the probe over to Mueller, a lawman with deep bipartisan respect, was a striking shift for Trump's Justice Department, which had resisted increasingly loud calls from Democrats for an outside prosecutor. It immediately escalated the legal stakes — and the potential political damage — for a president who has tried to dismiss the matter as partisan witch hunt and a “hoax.”

The announcement, the latest in the shock-a-day Washington saga, was made by deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. The White House counsel's office was alerted only after the order appointing Mueller was signed, said a senior White House official, who was not authorized to speak publicly by name and commented only on condition of anonymity.

In a written statement, Trump insisted anew there were no nefarious ties between his campaign and Russia.

“A thorough investigation will confirm what we already know — there was no collusion between my campaign and any foreign entity,” he declared. “I look forward to this matter concluding quickly.”

Mueller's broad mandate gives him not only oversight of the Russia probe, but also “any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation.” That would surely include Trump's firing last week of FBI Director James Comey.

Mueller, a former federal prosecutor at the Justice Department, was confirmed as FBI director days before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks



In this 2013 file photo, then-FBI director Robert Mueller speaks during an interview at FBI headquarters in Washington. The Justice Department appointed Mueller as a special counsel to oversee a federal investigation into potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign during the 2016 presidential election.

that would ultimately shape his tenure. The FBI's counterterrorism mission was elevated in those years, as the U.S. intelligence agencies adjusted to better position America to prevent another attack of such magnitude. He was so valued that President Barack Obama asked him to stay on two years longer than his 10-year term.

Comey succeeded him, appointed by Obama.

Mueller was appointed Wednesday by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who had faced criticism as the author of a memo that preceded Comey's firing. Rosenstein said the appointment was “necessary in order for the American people to have full confidence in the outcome.”

Republicans have largely stood behind Trump in the first months of his presidency as FBI and congressional investigations into Russia's election meddling intensified. But GOP lawmakers have grown increasingly anxious since Trump fired Comey, who had been

leading the bureau's probe — and after Comey associates said he had notes from a meeting in which Trump asked him to shut down the investigation into the Russia ties of former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

First reactions from Congress were mainly positive.

House Speaker Paul Ryan said the appointment was consistent with his goal of ensuring that “thorough and independent investigations are allowed to follow the facts wherever they may lead.”

Republican Jason Chaffetz of Utah, chairman of the House Oversight Committee, said Mueller was a “great selection. Impeccable credentials. Should be widely accepted.”

And not a moment too soon, Democrats said.

“I believe Mueller will be independent, he will be thorough and he will be fair and he's not going to be easily swayed,” said Elijah Cummings of Maryland, top Democrat on the oversight panel.

Cummings has vigorously urged such an appointment, suggesting it could lead to accusations of obstruction of justice.

In the 1990s, Democrats complained that independent counsel Kenneth Starr, who investigated President Bill Clinton, overstepped his authority.

The latest political storm, coupled with the still-potent fallout from Trump's recent disclosure of classified information to Russian diplomats at the White House, has overshadowed all else in the capital and beyond. Stocks fell sharply on Wall Street Wednesday as investors worried the latest turmoil in Washington could hinder Trump's pro-business agenda.

Trump has repeatedly slammed the FBI and congressional investigations as a “hoax” and blamed disgruntled officials at intelligence agencies for leaking information related to the probes. During a commencement address Wednesday at the Coast Guard Academy, he complained bitterly about criticism he's faced.

“No politician in history, and I say this with great surety, has been treated worse or more unfairly,” he said. “You can't let the critics and the naysayers get in the way of your dreams. ... I guess that's why we won. Adversity makes you stronger. Don't give in, don't back down. ... And the more righteous your fight, the more opposition that you will face.”

No less a commentator than Russia's Vladimir Putin called the dramatic charges swirling around Trump evidence of “political schizophrenia spreading in the U.S.” He offered to furnish a “record” of the Trump-diplomats meeting in the Oval Office if the White House desired it.

There was no word on what that record might entail, a question many were likely to raise in light of Trump's recent warning to Comey that he had “better hope” there were no tapes of a discussion they'd had.

The White House has disputed Comey's account of his February conversation with Trump concerning Flynn but has not offered specifics. Several congressional Republicans said Wednesday that if Trump did suggest that Comey “let this go” regarding Flynn's Russian contacts, it was probably just a joke, light banter.

Both of the explosive revelations — that the president pressed his FBI director to drop a federal investigation before later firing him, and that he disclosed classified information to senior Russian officials — came from anonymous sources, and the White House was quick to denounce the leaks and deny any impropriety. Trump aides said he never tried to squelch the Flynn investigation nor made inappropriate disclosures to the Russians.

On Capitol Hill, Comey was clearly the man in demand, with three committees working to seat him at their witness tables soon, two in the Senate and one in the House.

The Senate intelligence committee also asked acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe to turn over any notes Comey might have made regarding discussions he had with White House or Justice Department officials about Russia's efforts to influence the election.

McCabe had other matters on his mind, too. He was one of four potential candidates to lead the FBI that Trump was interviewing. The others were former Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman, former Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating and Richard McFeely, a former top FBI official.

Trump is preparing to leave town Friday on his first foreign trip, and aides have been hopeful the journey will be a chance for the administration to get back on track after weeks of chaos and distractions.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., speculated Trump was probably happy to get out of town — “and a lot of us are glad he's leaving for a few days.”

## BRIEFLY

### With waiver, U.S. lets Iran keep getting benefits of nuke deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration took a key step Wednesday toward preserving the Obama-era nuclear deal with Iran, coupling the move with fresh ballistic missile sanctions to show it isn't going light on the Islamic republic.

The State Department said Iran would continue to enjoy relief from decades-old economic measures punishing Tehran for its nuclear program. Under the 2015 nuclear agreement, the U.S. lifted those sanctions. But Washington must issue periodical waivers to keep the penalties from snapping back into place and the most recent one was set to expire this week.

Donald Trump as a candidate vowed to renegotiate or tear up the nuclear deal. As president, he has altered his position, insisting he is still studying the accord and hasn't made a final decision. The move to extend the sanctions relief in the meantime was another indication Trump may be laying the groundwork to let the deal stand.

Still, the U.S. paired the announcement with new, unrelated sanctions that go after Iran for a ballistic missiles program that Washington fears could target American interests in the Middle East or key allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Wednesday's sanctions target Iranian military officials along with an Iranian company and China-based network accused of supplying Iran with materials for ballistic missiles, the State Department said.

The dual moves — ensuring old sanctions on Iran don't return while imposing new ones — appeared aimed at undercutting the impression that Trump's stance on Iran has softened. Since taking office, Trump's administration has sanctioned hundreds in Iran and in Syria — an Iranian ally — as part of a campaign to increase pressure on Iran even as it reviews the nuclear deal.

Stuart Jones, the top U.S. diplomat in charge of the Middle East, said the U.S. is still forming a “comprehensive Iran policy” that addresses Iran's support for Syrian President Bashar Assad's government and militant groups in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

### Trump interviews four candidates for FBI director

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday interviewed four potential candidates to lead the FBI, including former Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman, former Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating and Andrew McCabe, currently the bureau's acting director.

Trump also met with Richard McFeely, a former top FBI official. Attorney General Jeff Sessions participated in the interviews.

The meetings came more than a week after Trump fired James Comey from his post as FBI director.

Trump said Monday that the search for a successor to Comey was “moving rapidly.” He also has said he could name a candidate by the end of the week, before he departs Friday afternoon on his first overseas trip as president. The Senate must confirm whoever Trump nominates.

Press Secretary Sean Spicer informed reporters about the meetings as Trump flew to Washington after addressing U.S. Coast Guard Academy graduates in Connecticut.

### Stocks, bonds drop as Washington turmoil roils Wall Street

NEW YORK (AP) — The brewing political crisis in Washington rattled Wall Street Wednesday, knocking the Dow Jones industrial average down more than 370 points and giving the stock market its biggest single-day slump in eight months.

Investors worried that President Donald Trump's pro-business agenda could be hindered by fallout from allegations that he asked the FBI to end an investigation into former National

Security Adviser Michael Flynn.

The steep drop ended an unusually long period of calm for the markets, which had been hovering near all-time highs.

Financial stocks, which had soared in the months since the election, declined the most as bond yields fell sharply. Bonds, utilities and gold rose as traders shunned riskier assets. The dollar fell.

“When you are at these valuations, the market has to reassess whether or not the agenda is actually going to be implemented,” said Quincy Krosby, market strategist at Prudential Financial. “What you're seeing is a classic run toward safety.”

The Standard & Poor's 500 index had its biggest drop since September, sliding 43.64 points, or 1.8 percent, to 2,357.03. The Dow lost 372.82 points, or 1.8 percent, to 20,606.93. The Nasdaq composite index, coming off setting two consecutive record highs, gave up 158.63 points, or 2.6 percent, to 6,011.24.

### Immigrant arrests soar under Trump, fewer deported

SANTA ANA, Calif. (AP) — U.S. immigration arrests increased nearly 40 percent in early 2017 as newly emboldened agents under President Donald Trump detained more than 40,000 people suspected of being in the country illegally — with a renewed focus on immigrants without criminal convictions.

The numbers released by Acting Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Thomas Homan provide a snapshot of how the new president is carrying through on his campaign promises to make immigration enforcement a top priority.

Overall, 41,300 people were arrested for deportation, a 38 percent increase from a comparable period last year. Nearly 11,000 had no criminal convictions, more than double the number of immigrants without criminal convictions arrested during a comparable period last year.

Homan said the increase in arrests stems from stepped up immigration enforcement, adding that morale has improved among agents under Trump because they are “allowed to do their job.”

“Their job is to enforce the law, and that is exactly what they're doing, he said.

Even so, deportations were down from late January to late April compared with a year ago despite the new president's stepped up immigration enforcement pledge.

The increase in arrests of people without criminal convictions has generated outrage across the U.S. from Trump opponents who believe otherwise law-abiding families are being rounded up.

The report was made public as the Trump administration seeks to promote its accomplishments despite a growing scandal over the firing of the FBI director and the sharing of intelligence with Russian officials.

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