

Trump officials cry ‘Not me!’ as he fumes over column in *The New York Times*

WASHINGTON (AP) — One after another, President Donald Trump’s top lieutenants stepped forward Thursday to declare, “Not me.”

They lined up to deny writing an incendiary *New York Times* opinion piece that was purportedly submitted by a member of an administration “resistance” movement straining to thwart Trump’s most dangerous impulses.

By email, by tweet and on camera, the denials paraded in from Cabinet-level officials — and even Vice President Mike Pence — apparently crafted for an audience of one, seated in the Oval Office. Senior officials in key national security and economic policy roles charged the article’s writer with cowardice, disloyalty and acting against America’s interests in harsh terms that mimicked the president’s own words.

Trump was incensed about the column, calling around to confidants to vent about the author, solicit guesses as to his or her identity and fume that a “deep state” within the administration was conspiring against him. He ordered aides to unmask the writer, and issued an extraordinary demand that the newspaper reveal the author to the government.

As striking as the essay was the long list of officials who plausibly could have been its author. Many have privately shared some of the article’s same concerns about Trump with colleagues, friends and reporters.

Twitter permanently bans Alex Jones, Infowars, citing abusive behavior online

NEW YORK (AP) — Twitter permanently banned right-wing conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and his Infowars show for abusive behavior, a day after CEO Jack Dorsey testified before Congress about alleged bias against conservatives on the platform.

The company said Jones won’t be able to create new accounts on Twitter or take over any existing ones. In a tweet, it said it would continue to monitor reports about other accounts potentially associated with Jones or Infowars, and will “take action” if it finds any attempts to circumvent the ban.

Twitter said Jones posted a video on Wednesday that violates the company’s policy against “abusive behavior.” That video showed Jones berating CNN journalist Oliver Darcy for some 10 minutes in between two congressional hearings on social media. Dorsey testified at both hearings, but did not appear to witness the confrontation.

Jones had about 900,000 followers on Twitter. Infowars had about 430,000. Jones did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



AP Photo/Noah Berger

A scorched VW Beetle rests in a clearing after the Delta Fire burned through the Lamoine community in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, Calif., on Thursday.

New Jersey Democratic Rep. Frank Pallone praised Twitter’s action in a tweet. “Glad Twitter is taking steps to put an end to the abusive behavior from Alex Jones & Infowars,” the tweet stated. “Tweets designed to threaten, belittle, demean and silence individuals have no place on this platform.”

Mexican prosecutors find 166 skulls in mass graves

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Investigators said Thursday they have found 166 skulls in clandestine burial pits in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz, one of the biggest mass graves discovered so far in Mexico.

Veracruz state prosecutor Jorge Winckler said that for security reasons he would not reveal the location of the site.

Mexican drug cartels frequently use clandestine pits to dispose of their victims.

Winckler said the bodies were buried at least two years ago and did not rule out finding more remains. He said investigators had found 114 ID cards in the field, which held about 32 burial pits.

Clothes, personal possession and other parts of skeletons also were recovered, but investigators focused on the skulls in counting, because each corresponds to one person.

California takes financial wallop from wildfires

SHASTA-TRINITY NATIONAL FOREST, Calif. (AP) — California is taking a financial wallop from unrelenting wildfires that have drained its firefighting budget and prompted nearly \$1 billion in property claims

even before the start of the dangerous fall fire season, officials said Thursday.

The disclosures came as a roaring blaze in a rural area near the Oregon border closed 45 miles (72 kilometers) of heavily traveled Interstate 5, the main highway from Mexico to Canada.

Fierce orange flames forced panicked truckers to abandon big-rigs and brought screams from motorists as they watched the advancing fire in Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

A decision was expected Friday on when to reopen the highway.

The wildfire flared just weeks after a blaze in the Redding area killed eight people and burned about 1,100 homes.

Democrats make final attempt to block Kavanaugh confirmation to High Court

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats mounted a last, ferocious attempt Thursday to paint Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh as a foe of abortion rights and a likely defender of President Donald Trump if he makes it to the high court. But their chances of blocking Trump’s nominee seemed to fade away by the end of a second marathon day of testimony in his confirmation hearing.

Questioning of the 53-year-old appellate judge wound down without him revealing much about his judicial stances or making any serious mistakes that might jeopardize his confirmation. In what almost seemed like a celebration, Kavanaugh’s two daughters returned to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing room for the final hours of testimony, accompanied by teammates on Catholic school basketball teams their father has coached.

The hearing pivoted during the day to Roe v. Wade, the high court’s landmark abortion case. The Democrats’ best hope of stopping Kavanaugh — who could swing the court further to the right for decades — would be branding him as a justice who might vote to overturn the ruling, attracting the votes of two Republican senators who support abortion rights.

A newly disclosed email suggested he once indicated the abortion case was not settled law, though Kavanaugh denied in the hearing that he had been expressing his personal views on the issue.

The tone in the email from 2003 contrasted with his responses to questions on Wednesday when he stressed how difficult it is to overturn precedents like Roe. In the email, Kavanaugh was reviewing a potential op-ed article in support of two judicial nominees while he was working at the George W. Bush White House. The document had been held by the committee as confidential, but was made public Thursday.

Film academy president says popular Oscar proposal was ‘misunderstood’

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The idea to hand out a popular film Oscar has been shelved for now following widespread backlash, but film academy president John Bailey says that the new category was well-intentioned in its efforts to reflect a changing industry and misunderstood by its critics.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said Thursday that it will further study plans for the category, citing the fact that implementing a new award three quarters of the way into the year would create challenges for films that have already been released.

The academy announced the new category for “outstanding achievement in popular film” last month without parameters, spawning immediate questions about the criteria and how it would impact critically and commercially films such as “Black Panther,” which has been cited as a possible best picture contender.

Bailey told The Associated Press he was surprised by the negative reaction to the new category and feels that that people did not understand its goal to give recognition to the kinds of films that are being made today.

“The idea of this award was not about trying to make sure that certain kinds of big mass market pictures get recognized. To my mind, it’s more about the kind of pictures that are so difficult to get made,” Bailey said, citing films that he worked on like “The Big Chill” and “Ordinary People” as the kind of “middle pictures” that major studios don’t make as many of and, when they do, aren’t often recognized with the film industry’s most prestigious award.

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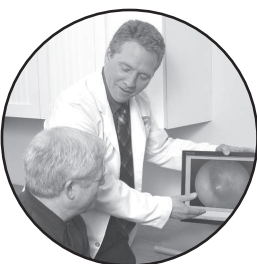
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