

## News

# Pam Bondi, a Trump loyalist who oversaw Justice Department upheaval, is out as his attorney general

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that Pam Bondi is out as his attorney general, ending the contentious tenure of a loyalist who upended the Justice Department's culture of independence from the White House, oversaw large-scale firings of career employees and moved aggressively to investigate the Republican president's perceived enemies.

The departure followed months of scrutiny over the Justice Department's handling of files related to the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking investigation and failed efforts to meet Trump's unwavering demands for criminal cases against his adversaries. As Trump's own frustrations mounted, he began privately discussing firing Bondi, people familiar with the matter say.

"Pam Bondi is a Great American Patriot and a loyal friend, who faithfully served as my Attorney General over the past year," Trump said in a statement. He added, "We love Pam, and she will be transitioning to a much needed and important new job in the private sector, to be announced at a date in the near future."

Trump named Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, one of his former personal lawyers, as the acting attorney general. Three people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Thursday that he has privately discussed Lee Zeldin, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, as a permanent pick.

In her own statement, Bondi called the job "the honor of a lifetime" and said she would be working over the next month to transition the position to Blanche.

Bondi came into office 14 months ago, pledging that she would not play politics with the Justice Department. But she

quickly set out to do Trump's bidding, heaping lavish praise at congressional hearings and White House events, firing prosecutors deemed insufficiently loyal to the president and opening investigations into his political foes. The intense turmoil contributed to the resignations of hundreds of employees, with the norm-breaking actions stirring concern that the department was being wielded as a tool to advance Trump's personal and political interests.

"Pam Bondi oversaw an unprecedented weaponization of the Justice Department that brought our nation's rule of law to its knees," said Sen. Adam Schiff, a California Democrat.

Bondi rejected accusations that she politicized the Justice Department and said her mission was to restore the institution's credibility after overreach by President Joe Biden's Democratic administration, which included two federal criminal cases against Trump. Bondi's defenders have said she worked to refocus the department to better tackle illegal immigration and violent crime and brought much-needed change to an agency they believe unfairly targeted conservatives.

Embracing, supporting and protecting the president

Bondi's public embrace of the president, however, marked a sharp departure from her predecessors, who generally took pains to maintain an arm's-length distance from the White House to protect the impartiality of investigations and prosecutions. Bondi postured herself as Trump's chief supporter and protector, praising and defending him in congressional hearings and placing a banner with his face on the exterior of Justice Department headquarters.

She called for an end to the "weaponization" of law enforcement that she said occurred under the Biden administration,



President Donald Trump speaks with Attorney General Pam Bondi during a roundtable discussion on public safety at a Tennessee Air National Guard Base, Monday, March 23, 2026, in Memphis, Tenn.

AP PHOTO/MARK SCHIEFELBEIN

even though Biden's attorney general, Merrick Garland, and Jack Smith, the special counsel who produced two cases against Trump, have said they followed the facts, the evidence and the law in their decision-making. Bondi's critics, meanwhile, said she was the one who had politicized the agency.

"You've turned the People's Department of Justice into Trump's instrument of revenge," Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary committee, said at a February hearing.

Bondi delivered a combative performance but few substantive answers at that hearing, as she angrily insulted her Democratic questioners with name-calling and praised Trump for the performance of the stock market — "The Dow is up over 50,000 right now!" — and openly aligned herself as in sync with a president whom she painted as a victim of past impeachments and investigations.

Even Republicans began to challenge her, with the GOP-led House Oversight Committee last month issuing a subpoena to her to appear for a closed-door interview about the Epstein files.

Under Bondi's leadership, the department opened investigations into a string of Trump foes, including Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, New York Attorney General Letitia James, former FBI Director James Comey and former CIA Director John Brennan. The high-profile prosecutions of Comey and James were short-lived as they were quickly thrown out by a judge who ruled that the prosecutor who brought the

cases was illegally appointed.

Trump repeatedly praised and defended Bondi publicly but also showed flashes of impatience with his attorney general's efforts to meet his demands to prosecute his rivals. In one extraordinary social media post last year, Trump called on Bondi to move quickly to prosecute his foes, including James and Comey, telling her, "We can't delay any longer, it's killing our reputation and credibility."

Bondi oversaw the exodus of thousands of career employees — both through firings and voluntary departures — including lawyers who prosecuted violent attacks on police at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021; environmental, civil rights and ethics enforcers; counterterrorism prosecutors; and others.

Fumbling the Epstein files She struggled to overcome early stumbles over the Epstein files that angered conservatives eager for government bombshells about the case, which has long fascinated conspiracy theorists. She herself had fed the conspiracy theory machine with a suggestion in a 2025 Fox News Channel interview that Epstein's "client list" was sitting on her desk for review. The department later acknowledged that no such document exists.

Bondi was ridiculed over a move to hand out binders of Epstein files to conservative influencers at the White House, only for it to be later revealed that the documents included no new revelations. And despite promises that more files were going to become public, the Justice Department in July said no more would be released, prompting

Congress to pass a bill to force the agency to do so. Ultimately, the department said it had complied with its obligations by releasing millions more records.

Jess Michaels, an Epstein survivor who traveled to the U.S. Capitol last year to press for the files' release, said she was optimistic when Bondi took office but lost faith after Bondi distributed the binders at the White House.

"I think she had this opportunity to be a hero and to really do right by survivors of sexual violence and trafficking, and she chose not to," Michaels said by phone. "It is outrageous, the volume of miscalculation she has made."

The Epstein files fumbles led to a stunning public criticism from White House chief of staff Susie Wiles, a close friend of Bondi's, who told Vanity Fair that the attorney general "completely whiffed." The Justice Department's release of millions of pages of Epstein files did little to tamp down criticism, prompting a House committee, with the support of five Republicans, to subpoena Bondi to answer questions under oath.

Bondi, who defended Trump during his first impeachment trial, was his second choice to lead the Justice Department, picked for the role after former Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida withdrew his name from consideration amid scrutiny over sex trafficking allegations.

Associated Press writers Matthew Daly in Washington and Jennifer Peltz in New York contributed to this report.



Attorney General Pam Bondi leaving after the end of President Donald Trump's remarks to reporters in the James Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House, Feb. 20, 2026, in Washington. AP PHOTO/ALEX BRANDON, FILE

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