

New attorney general pick's past vow: prosecute the 'bad' prosecutors who indicted Trump

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In 2013, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi's office faced a decision: whether to join investigations from other state attorneys general into Trump University, where students paid up to \$35,000 for business classes that critics claimed were fraudulent. Despite receiving complaints of exploitation from students, Bondi and then-California Attorney General Kamala Harris both declined to join the investigation. Both had received political donations from Donald Trump and denied that the funds influenced their office's decision. Since then, the two former state attorneys general have followed polar opposite political paths. Harris attacked Trump in the 2020 and 2024 elections and painted him as a business fraud and threat to democracy. Trump won re-election earlier this month.

Bondi spent the last decade defending Trump and attacking those who investigate him. Now, if confirmed by the Senate, Bondi is set to become President-elect Trump's attorney general. A central question is whether Bondi will follow through on vows she made in television interviews to investigate what she called out-of-control federal prosecutors and FBI agents.

"The Department of Justice, the prosecutors will be prosecuted, the bad ones," Bondi said on Fox News last year after Trump was indicted in Georgia on charges of trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election. *"The investigators will be investigated."*

Bondi called the prosecutors who charged Trump with crimes **members of "the deep state"** — spreading a false conspiracy theory that DOJ prosecutors and FBI agents were part of a **secret cabal** trying to undermine Trump. Bondi, without citing evidence, said that since they were no longer "hiding in the shadows ... they can all be investigated."

Bondi did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Current and former Justice Department officials have expressed mixed reactions to Bondi, whom Trump picked to be attorney general hours after Rep. Matt Gaetz, who has repeatedly denied allegations of paying prostitutes and having sex with a minor, withdrew from consideration. The DOJ officials said they view Bondi as **a much more favorable pick than Gaetz** because she had a long career as a local prosecutor and Florida attorney general. At the same time, they see her as a Trump loyalist whom they fear will not hesitate to carry out his push to investigate his enemies. *"I would expect her to do exactly what Trump wants her to do,"* said a recently departed senior Justice Department official. He added that members of Special Counsel Jack Smith's team are very concerned and talking to lawyers.

On Friday, The Washington Post, citing two individuals close to Trump's transition, reported that Trump intends to fire Smith and the entire team that helped Smith indict Trump on federal charges of mishandling classified documents and attempting to overturn the 2020 election results. The Post also reported that Trump expects the Justice Department to investigate his long-discredited claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 election.

Trump's last attorney general, William Barr, was dismissive of Trump's 2020 claims of election fraud and declined to launch Justice Department investigations into them, citing a lack of evidence. After publicly stating that there was no evidence of widespread fraud, Barr resigned. When Trump tried to appoint Jeffrey Clark, a DOJ official who supported his false 2020 fraud claims, as acting attorney general, a half dozen senior DOJ leaders threatened to resign. Three days later, Trump's supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol to block the certification of his defeat.

Bondi, meanwhile, supported Trump's claims of fraud. She traveled to Philadelphia and held news conferences where she promoted false claims of widespread ballot fraud and insisted the election had been stolen from Trump. *"We know that ballots have been dumped,"* Bondi said. *"We've heard that people were receiving ballots that were dead. The thing that is happening all over the country."*

Bondi also served as a defense lawyer for Trump during his first impeachment, claiming the president was being unfairly investigated.

Bondi is currently a partner at the lobbying firm Ballard Partners, where she chairs the company's corporate regulatory compliance practice, according to the firm's website. Some Florida attorneys have defended Bondi and said she followed norms as state attorney general. Dave Aronberg, the state attorney for Palm Beach County, Florida, told The Washington Post that Bondi will be much better for the DOJ than Gaetz.

"She is hands-on and she is also loyal to her co-workers, meaning she's not going to try to push anyone out because they are a Democrat or a career prosecutor who is apolitical," Aronberg told the Post. "She believes in the rule of law."

The question now is whether Bondi, if confirmed, will keep her public promise that "***the prosecutors will be prosecuted.***" And, if she declines to prosecute prosecutors for political reasons, will be forced out by Trump like her predecessors. A former DOJ official who worked during the first Trump administration said that he did not know Bondi well but that he did know Trump.

"I think whoever he picks is bound to be loyal to him first and foremost," he said. "That's the key test for him. I don't expect him to pick someone who will be honorable and loyal to the Constitution above him."