



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 10, 2026

Trump Concedes Reflecting Pool Contractor Errors, but Still Blames Vandals as Prosecutors Drop Cases

President Donald Trump wanted the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool repainted for America's 250th birthday.

Instead, the \$14.7-million project has produced peeling blue coating, [massive](#) algae infestation, repeated repairs, four abandoned criminal cases, and an embarrassing spat inside his own administration. Prosecutors have now [dropped](#) charges against all four people accused of damaging the pool.

Trump now [acknowledges](#) that contractors made "errors" while "rushing the job." But he still insists vandals caused much of the damage.



AP Images
Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pool

The Department of Justice (DOJ), in a rare break with the president's public narrative, reached a different conclusion. Prosecutors determined that flawed installation and rushed construction had undermined the cases they brought.

That finding has put U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro at odds with both Trump and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, whose department oversaw the troubled project.

"A Quick Fix"

As we [previously reported](#), Trump unveiled the renovation in April after complaining that the Reflecting Pool looked "filthy" and "disgusting." He said a contractor he knew could fix it for less than \$2 million and finish quickly.

The price tag quickly ballooned.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) awarded Atlantic Industrial Coatings a no-bid contract that eventually reached about [\\$14.7 million](#). Trump also approved a blue industrial coating for the basin, which he called "American flag blue."

Preservationists objected. The Cultural Landscape Foundation [sued the administration](#), arguing that it had bypassed required federal reviews.

Then the practical problems appeared.

Algae returned. Sections of the new coating began peeling away. Photographs showed loose material floating to the surface. Trump [blamed](#) "Radical Left Lunatics, most likely Dumocats," for sabotage. He said vandals had cut a 250-foot section of the coating with a knife or blade. He also suggested someone may have poured fertilizer into the water to encourage algae growth.

Federal authorities began arresting people.



The Case Against an Olympian

The most serious case involved David Hearn, a 67-year-old former Olympic canoeist from Bethesda, Maryland.

Hearn said he stopped at the pool during a bike ride on June 19. He noticed a loose piece of coating and reached into the water to touch it. He said he let go when a park employee told him to stop.

A grand jury [indicted Hearn on July 2](#) for felony destruction of property. The stakes were considerable. Because prosecutors [alleged](#) more than \$1,000 in damage, Hearn faced up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Pirro announced the charge personally.

“Vandalism at treasured places like the Reflecting Pool is an affront to our shared history and the dignity of our national heritage,” she stated.

She [told the press](#):

We will prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Hearn willfully destroyed property.

Hearn [pleaded not guilty](#). And the evidence soon created trouble for the government.

[The Associated Press](#) quoted Hearn’s attorney, who wrote that a National Park Service witness testified that the pool already had “substantial damage” before Hearn touched it. A follow-up report added:

In addition, [the defense lawyers] say, the government’s key eyewitness was never presented to the grand jury, and a key prosecution witness on the question of damages “stated that the repairs at issue would have been necessary regardless of Mr. Hearn’s alleged conduct and could not identify any additional cost caused by Mr. Hearn.”

The Case Falls Apart

By July 31, Pirro’s office had failed to find any evidence of the Olympian’s wrongdoing.

In a [motion](#) to dismiss the case, prosecutors said that, according to the documents provided by the DOI,

work on installing the lining almost immediately fell behind, due to a combination of very rainy and windy weather, repeated failures of testing on the sealing of the expansion joints, and delays in obtaining sealing product at the worksite. The rush to complete the project led to hasty and botched work that was not remediated before the project was finished and the fencing removed.

They also conceded:

It is difficult to attribute the widespread damage to the Reflecting Pool to vandalism, let alone to establish that fact beyond a reasonable doubt.

Pirro’s office blamed Interior for failing to provide the full picture earlier.



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 10, 2026

The department had supplied “less than fulsome information at the outset of this case,” prosecutors wrote. Had Interior been forthcoming with records already in its possession, they said, the government would not have sought the indictment.

Prosecutors also dropped cases against three other people accused of damaging the pool. Judge Todd Edelman formally dismissed Hearn’s case on August 6. He has not yet decided whether the dismissal will prevent prosecutors from charging Hearn again; his lawyers want the case dismissed with prejudice.

Infighting

The reversal triggered a remarkable fight inside the administration.

Trump attacked Pirro, his longtime ally and a former *Fox News* host. Last Monday, [he told](#) the press that she “choked” and “folded like an umbrella.” He added that he was “very disappointed” with her. Asked whether she would remain U.S. attorney, Trump declined to guarantee her job.

Pirro then took her case to the White House.

During a contentious Oval Office meeting, Pirro reportedly confronted Burgum over the information his department had supplied to prosecutors. [The New York Times](#) reported on the clash:

Ms. Pirro ... directly confronted Mr. Burgum, accusing him of misleading the president. She made the case that Mr. Burgum had promoted a self-serving cover story to conceal his own missteps.

The report also says Pirro brought “a white box containing evidence, plus a black box with documents, on wheels.”

She could no longer make a case against Hearn. She did, however, make one against Burgum, noted the *Times*:

Ms. Pirro’s filing suggested that Mr. Burgum had committed the twofold sin of failing to competently oversee the renovation, then prodding Mr. Trump to accept the vandals-did-it story.

On August 1, Burgum [again blamed](#) vandals for the damage of the project he oversaw. He said the evidence of that was “clear,” and that “some of these acts were even caught on camera.”

The Official Story Starts to Bend

Yet no such video has publicly materialized.

At the same time, Trump’s own account has gradually moved closer to the position taken by prosecutors.

On Saturday, he posted photographs of [peeling material](#) and [apparent graffiti](#) and labeled them “Vandalism.” A day earlier, he had [urged](#) Pirro to “re-visit her hastily made decision.”

Then, on Sunday, Trump [acknowledged](#) a central fact in her filing:

As with many jobs, there was also some contractor error done by rushing the job for a July



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 10, 2026

4th opening....

He described the contractor problems as limited and “relatively inconsequential, and still accused Hearn of vandalism. He said a “highly credible” National Park Service employee had seen the man “violently” pulling at the coating.

But the president also conceded a major weakness in the broader vandalism claim:

There was substantial other damage to the Reflecting Pool, also but, unfortunately, there is no video or proof, other than the damage, itself.

That leaves the administration with two explanations that now partly overlap.

The renovation clearly suffered installation failures. Trump now acknowledges that. His own prosecutors say those failures undermined the factual basis for the cases they brought. But Trump still maintains that separate acts of vandalism also occurred.

The deeper problem is institutional.

Federal prosecutors charged citizens based on information supplied by another federal department. When later records undercut that account, the prosecutor who followed the evidence found herself under pressure from the president to reverse course.

What began as a quick “beautification” project has become another expensive and embarrassing government failure. It damaged a historic landmark, produced dubious criminal cases, and exposed an administration more eager to deflect blame than to examine, much less acknowledge, its own mistakes.



Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



Subscribe

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.