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Republican Eyes Sweet Home for New FBI Headquarters in Alabama

GOP has criticized bureau, based in Washington, for its investigations of Donald Trump and others

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The FBI is inching closer to moving from its current headquarters, a brutalist, concrete behemoth just blocks from the White House, to Washington's suburbs. PHOTO: TING SHEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Republicans have a new idea for how to take Washington politics out of the FBI: Take the FBI out of Washington and send it to Huntsville, Ala.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan (R., Ohio), who has accused the bureau of overzealously investigating former President Donald Trump and his allies, wants to strip the bureau of funding for a new headquarters unless it relocates to the midsize Alabama city a 700-mile drive from the nation's capital.

The Huntsville proposal, which Jordan included in a list of recommendations Tuesday to the Appropriations Committee writing funding legislation for next year, is unlikely to become law but marks Republicans' latest effort to force changes to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It comes as the bureau is inching closer to moving from its current headquarters, a brutalist,

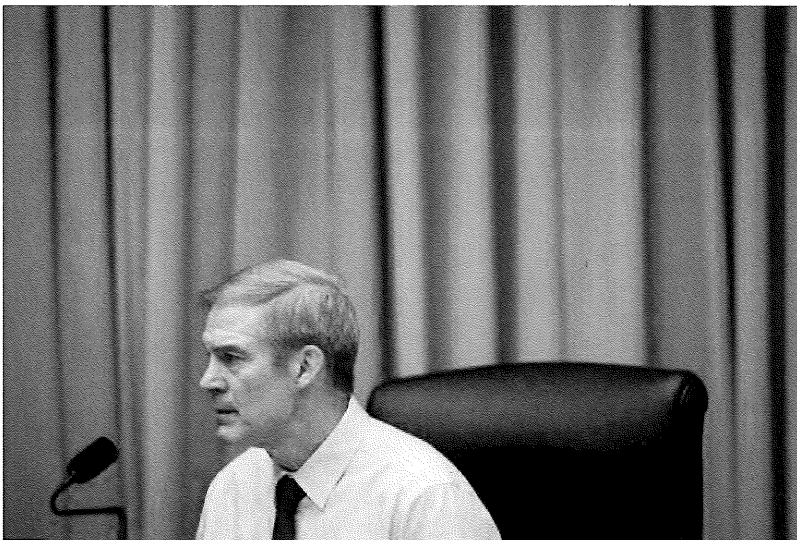
concrete behemoth blocks from the White House, to the city's suburbs. In recent weeks, Republicans have threatened to obstruct funding for a new facility as part of a broader swipe at the FBI, with some going so far as saying the agency should be dismantled.

"Drain the Swamp," Jordan tweeted on Tuesday regarding his plan.

FBI Director Christopher Wray has repeatedly defended the bureau's integrity. Justice Department officials, including Attorney General Merrick Garland, have vehemently denied their investigations are influenced by partisanship. A federal grand jury in June indicted Trump on 37 counts related to his postpresidential handling of classified materials at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida. He has pleaded not guilty.

Asked about the Alabama proposal, the FBI said that any budget cuts would be "detrimental to the support the FBI provides to the American people" and that there are "numerous operational reasons" to keep the headquarters in the Washington area, including its closeness to its academy near Quantico, Va., and other intelligence agencies it interacts with daily.

Members of both parties for decades have promoted the idea of moving federal workers and agencies out of the Washington area whether for political or parochial reasons.



Rep. Jim Jordan (R., Ohio) argues investigators would be less likely to be infected by what he sees as liberal politics if the FBI were based in Alabama. PHOTO: CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

West Virginia Democratic Sen. Robert Byrd, who died in 2010, tried to move thousands of Central Intelligence Agency workers to his economically depressed home state. More recently, the Trump administration relocated the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management to Grand Junction, Colo., saying that officials should be closer to the public lands they oversee.

The Trump administration also moved two Agriculture Department research agencies to the Kansas City area.

Many federal workers quit their jobs rather than relocate. “What a wonderful way to streamline government and do what we haven’t been able to do for a long time,” then-White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said at a state GOP event in South Carolina at the time, the news outlet Government Executive reported.



The FBI currently works out of the J. Edgar Hoover Building, where officials have quick access to prosecutors in the Justice Department’s headquarters across Pennsylvania Avenue. PHOTO: TING SHEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Biden administration later reversed course on the Bureau of Land Management relocation after his Interior secretary said that it had led to a “significant loss of institutional memory and talent.”

Still, the FBI headquarters fight stands out, after years of twists and turns.

The FBI now works out of the J. Edgar Hoover Building, where officials have quick access to prosecutors in the Justice Department’s headquarters across Pennsylvania Avenue. But the bureau has complained that the current HQ, named for the agency’s first and longest-serving director, is crumbling and no longer meets the needs of an organization that has grown in the nearly 50 years since President Gerald Ford dedicated the building. The FBI’s separate Washington field office would be unaffected by any move.

The General Services Administration, which manages the federal government’s real estate, has been weighing sites in Virginia and Maryland for the location of a new FBI headquarters campus. About 5,500 workers are assigned to the Hoover building.

Jordan wants to see the bureau based at Huntsville's Redstone Arsenal, a U.S. Army post where the FBI already has a growing campus that is home to more than 1,000 employees. Although Democrats view the proposal as nothing more than a dig at the FBI, Jordan argues investigators would be less likely to be infected by what he sees as liberal politics if the bureau were based in deep-red Alabama than alongside other government and national-security agencies in and around the nation's capital.



FBI Director Christopher Wray, second from right, attends the groundbreaking ceremony for the Innovation Center at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala., in 2021. PHOTO: FBI

Three Jordan staffers recently toured the Huntsville center, which FBI officials sometimes call their unofficial second headquarters, the people familiar with the matter said.

The Judiciary Committee will question Wray during an oversight hearing Wednesday, part of Jordan's examination of what he calls the FBI's politicization. Among other gripes, Republicans accuse the Justice Department of giving President Biden's son, Hunter, lenient treatment by allowing him to plead guilty to two misdemeanor tax charges and a chance to avoid prosecution on a separate gun offense.

The FBI's jobs website touts its Redstone Arsenal campus in Huntsville as "the epicenter of the FBI's technology infrastructure for the future." Employees there conduct forensic analysis, sort through data for investigations and monitor networks for cyberattacks, the site says.

In the FBI headquarters fight, the GSA began exploring a relocation in 2013, but the process ground to a halt in 2017, when the Trump administration scrapped the effort. Democrats at the time accused Trump of intervening in the project to help protect business for his nearby

hotel, and a government watchdog found that he was involved in the headquarters decision. The former Trump International Hotel is now a Waldorf Astoria. A White House spokeswoman said at the time that Trump was interested in making sure taxpayer dollars were well spent.

On the status of the move, the GSA said Monday that it was considering feedback from stakeholders and that it and the FBI are “deliberately considering the input we received as part of the latest round of consultations to determine next steps on the site selection process.” A spokesman said the statement only related to the consultations the agency had with Maryland and Virginia.

Sen. Tim Kaine (D., Va.), who has lobbied for his state, said Alabama wasn’t the right place.

“Ain’t gonna happen,” he said. “The issue is what serves the needs of the agency. The FBI wants to stay in the D.C. metro area, so that’s where it’s going to be.”

The FBI said on its website that it is building two campuses at Redstone. But in its statement to The Wall Street Journal, it added that its facilities there couldn’t accommodate the minimum of 8,500 personnel planned to occupy the new headquarters in the suburbs and downtown Washington facilities.

Huntsville is home to other defense and technology industries, including NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, once led by Wernher von Braun, who developed rocket technology for Nazi Germany before heading up NASA’s rocket-development program. Huntsville was also named by the Trump administration as the permanent headquarters of the U.S. Space Command, but the ultimate location of the facility remains unresolved as Colorado continues to seek the nod.

Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle said: “We’re proud of the FBI presence in Huntsville and will support whatever Congress decides is best for the betterment of our country.”

—*Jess Bravin contributed to this article.*

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Corrections & Amplifications

Huntsville, Ala., was named by the Trump administration as the permanent headquarters of

the U.S. Space Command. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said the city was named as the permanent headquarters of the U.S. Space Force. (Corrected on July 11)

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