



Trump Floats Election Delay, Lawmakers In Both Parties Reject Idea (Video)

President Donald Trump on Thursday raised the idea of delaying the Nov. 3 U.S. elections, an idea immediately rejected by both Democrats and his fellow Republicans in Congress – the sole branch of government with the authority to make such a change.

Trump's statement on Twitter comes as the United States is enduring a multi-pronged, once-in-a-generation crisis: a coronavirus pandemic that has claimed more than 150,000 lives, a crippling recession sparked by the outbreak, and nationwide protests against police violence and racism. On Thursday morning, the government reported the worst U.S. economic contraction since the Great Depression: 32.9% in the second quarter.

Trump, who opinion polls show trailing Democratic challenger and former Vice President Joe Biden, said he would not trust the results of an election that included widespread mail voting – a measure that many observers see as critical given the coronavirus pandemic. Without evidence, he claimed that ramped up mail voting would be rife with fraud, but praised absentee voting, which is also done by mail.

“With Universal Mail-In Voting (not Absentee Voting, which is good), 2020 will be the most INACCURATE & FRAUDULENT Election in history. It will be a great embarrassment to the USA,” Trump wrote on Twitter. “Delay the Election until people can properly, securely and safely vote???”

At a White House news conference later in the day, Trump did not repeat his call for an election delay but said he was worried about fraud and a long wait for results from counting mail ballots.

“Do I want to see a date change? No. But I don’t want to see a crooked election,” he told reporters.

The United States has held elections for more than 200 years, including during the Civil War, the Great Depression, and two world wars. Article II of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to set the timing of elections, and the 20th Amendment ends a president and vice president’s term in office on Jan. 20 following a general election.

Multiple congressional Republicans – including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and top House of Representatives Republican Kevin McCarthy – rejected the idea.

“Never in the history of the federal elections have we ever not held an election and we should go forward with our election,” said McCarthy.

Democratic U.S. Representative Zoe Lofgren, who chairs the House committee overseeing election security, also rejected any delay.

“Under no circumstances will we consider doing so to accommodate the President’s inept and haphazard response to the coronavirus pandemic, or give credence to the lies and misinformation he spreads,” Lofgren said in an email to Reuters.

Trump wrote on Twitter later on Thursday that Americans needed to know the election results on the night of the voting, not days or months later. Mail-in ballots can sometimes take longer to count.

“Glad I was able to get the very dishonest LameStream Media to finally start talking about the RISKS to our Democracy from dangerous Universal Mail-In-Voting,” he said in the tweet.

‘DESTABILIZING’

Trump’s tweets will deepen Democrats’ fears that he will try to interfere with the election or refuse to accept its outcome should he lose. Biden has called that his biggest fear and has gone so far as to suggest sending in the military to force Trump out if he refused to leave.

Democrats are preparing for fights over absentee ballots, potential voting recounts and the possibility that Trump’s Republican supporters will seek to intimidate voters at the polls.

The truly dangerous part of Trump’s tweet on Thursday was not his suggestion of delaying the election – which is a “fantasy” – but his latest claim that voting by mail is rife with fraud, according to Justin Levitt, a professor at Loyola Marymount University and a constitutional law expert.

“This is yet another example of the president seeking to delegitimize the election process before it happens,” Levitt said. “That is deeply destabilizing.”

A Republican close to the White House was stunned at the tweet, noting that it followed a period of stability in which Trump has stayed on message in response to advice from new campaign manager Bill Stepien and senior campaign manager Jason Miller.

“Obviously he just can’t help himself. This is starting to look like a real campaign, and then he does this,” the Republican source said. “It’s awful. It’s starting to look like he doesn’t even want to win.”

The White House referred questions about the tweet to Trump’s re-election campaign.

“The President is just raising a question about the chaos Democrats have created with their insistence on all mail-in voting,” said Hogan Gidley, the campaign’s press secretary. “Universal mail-in voting invites chaos and severe delays in results.”

Ari Fleischer, who was White House press secretary under Republican President George W. Bush, said Trump should delete the tweet.

“This is not an idea anyone, especially POTUS, should float. Our democracy is based on elections in which everyone knows the rules and they apply to all,” Fleischer said. “Mr. President – please don’t even pretend to mess with this. It’s a harmful idea.”

Polls have shown that U.S. registered voters oppose an election delay. When Reuters/Ipsos in April asked voters if they thought the election should be rescheduled due to the coronavirus, 59% opposed the idea, including a majority in each party.

A Biden campaign official called Trump’s tweet an obvious ploy to distract from the awful GDP numbers.

“We’re going to keep our eye on the ball,” the Biden campaign official said.

Dale Ho, director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s voting rights project, said Trump lacked the authority to reschedule an election.

“This is America,” Ho said. “We are a democracy, not a dictatorship. The Constitution sets the date for the election in November. Nothing President Trump says, does, or tweets can change that fact.”

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