



# MCCONNELL SEEKS TO PUSH TRUMP IMPEACHMENT TRIAL TO FEBRUARY

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Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is proposing to push back the start of Donald Trump's impeachment trial to February to give the former president time to prepare and review his case.

House Democrats who voted to impeach Trump last week for inciting the deadly Jan. 6 Capitol riot have signaled they want to move quickly to trial as President Joe Biden begins his term, saying a full reckoning is necessary before the country — and the Congress — can move on.

But McConnell in a statement Thursday evening suggested a more expansive timeline that would see the House transmit the article of impeachment next week, on Jan. 28, launching the trial's first phase. After that, the Senate would give the president's defense team and House prosecutors two weeks to file briefs. Arguments in the trial would likely begin in mid-February.

"Senate Republicans are strongly united behind the principle that the institution of the Senate, the office of the presidency, and former President Trump himself all deserve a full and fair process that respects his rights and the serious factual, legal, and constitutional questions at stake," especially given the unprecedented speed of the House process, McConnell said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., is reviewing the plan and will discuss it with McConnell, a spokesperson said. The two leaders are also negotiating how the new 50-50 Senate will work and how they will balance other priorities.

A trial delay could appeal to some Democrats, as it would give the Senate more time to confirm Biden's Cabinet nominees and debate a new round of coronavirus relief. Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, a key ally of the president's, told CNN that Democrats would consider a delay "if we are making progress on confirming the very talented, seasoned and diverse team that President Joe Biden has nominated."

The ultimate power over timing rests with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who can trigger the start of the trial at any point by sending to the Senate the charge of incitement of an insurrection. The California Democrat has not yet said when she will do that.

"It will be soon. I don't think it will be long, but we must do it," Pelosi said Thursday. She said Trump doesn't deserve a "get-out-of-jail card" just because he has left office and Biden and others are calling for national unity.

Facing his second impeachment trial in two years, Trump began to assemble his defense team by hiring attorney Butch Bowers to

represent him, according to an adviser. Bowers previously served as counsel to former South Carolina Govs. Nikki Haley and Mark Sanford.



Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina helped Trump find Bowers after members of his past legal teams indicated they did not plan to join the new effort. Trump is at a disadvantage compared to his first trial, in which he had the full resources of the White House counsel's office to defend him.

Pelosi's nine impeachment managers, who will be prosecuting the House case, have been regularly meeting to discuss strategy. Pelosi said she would talk to them "in the next few days" about when the Senate might be ready for a trial.

Shortly before the Jan. 6 insurrection, Trump told thousands of his supporters at a rally near the White House to "fight like hell" against the election results that Congress was certifying. A mob marched down to the Capitol and rushed in, interrupting the count. Five people, including a Capitol Police officer, died in the mayhem, and the House impeached Trump a week later, with 10 Republicans joining all Democrats in support.

Pelosi said it would be "harmful to unity" to forget that "people died here on Jan. 6, the attempt to undermine our election, to undermine our democracy, to dishonor our Constitution."

Trump was acquitted by the Republican-led Senate at his first impeachment trial. The White House legal team, aided by Trump's personal lawyers, aggressively fought the House charges that he had encouraged the president of Ukraine to investigate Biden in exchange for military aid. This time around, Pelosi noted, the House is not seeking to convict the president over private conversations but for a very public insurrection that they themselves experienced and that played out on live television.

"This year, the whole world bore witness to the president's incitement," Pelosi said.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat, said it was still too early to know how long a trial would take or if Democrats would want to call witnesses. But he said, "You don't need to tell us what was going on with the mob scene we were rushing down the staircase to escape."

McConnell, who said this week that Trump "provoked" his supporters before the riot, has not said how he will vote. He told his GOP colleagues that it will be a vote of conscience.

Democrats would need the support of at least 17 Republicans to convict Trump, a high bar. While a handful of Senate Republicans have indicated they are open to conviction, most have said they believe a trial will be divisive and questioned the legality of trying a president after he has left office.

Graham said that if he were Trump's lawyer, he would focus on that argument and on the merits of the case — and whether it was "incitement" under the law.

"I guess the public record is your television screen," Graham said. "So, I don't see why this would take a long time."

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Associated Press writers Meg Kinnard in Columbia, S.C., and Jill Colvin in West Palm Beach, Fla., contributed to this report. AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite.