

11 Senators Join Growing GOP Election Challenge, Despite Another Court Snub

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Ted Cruz / PHOTO: Associated Press

(Headline USA) A growing number of Republican lawmakers are joining President Donald Trump's extraordinary effort to challenge the projected outcome of the Nov. 3 election when Congress meets next week to count the Electoral College votes.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, on Saturday announced a coalition of 11 senators who have been enlisted for Trump's effort to subvert the will of American voters.

The group of senators and senators-elect includes:

- Ron Johnson of Wisconsin

- James Lankford of Oklahoma
- Steve Daines of Montana
- John Kennedy of Louisiana
- Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee
- Mike Braun of Indiana
- Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming
- Roger Marshall of Kansas
- Bill Hagerty of Tennessee
- Tommy Tuberville of Alabama

This follows the declaration from Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., who was the first to buck Senate leadership by saying he would join with House Republicans in objecting to the state tallies during Wednesday's joint session of Congress.

Hawley and Cruz are both among potential 2024 presidential contenders should Trump either prevail in his challenge or decide not to run again next term.

Trump's refusal to concede amid evidence of widespread vote fraud has posed a dilemma for Republicans as they mull the possibility of a post-Trump era.

While the vote fraud has threatened to create an alarming destabilization of democracy, the alternative is equally troubling. Trump, however, has promised that his legal team is ready to present concrete evidence of the fraud if given the opportunity.

Despite the lingering questions, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had urged his party not to back the challenge due to the political risk of having to go on record with a floor vote.

The 11 senators largely acknowledged Saturday they will not succeed in preventing Biden from being inaugurated on Jan. 20.

But their challenges, and those from House Republicans, represent the most sweeping challenge to the electoral outcome since the post-Civil War Reconstruction era.

"We do not take this action lightly," Cruz and the other senators said in a joint statement.

The last time Congress determined the presidency was 1877 when an even-split of

electors pushed Republican Rutherford B. Hayes into the presidency in what has come to be known as the “Corrupt Bargain.”

Legislators in several key battleground states where strong evidence of vote fraud was present have pledged to send rival electors on Jan. 6.

The GOP senators vowed to back the rival electors on Wednesday unless Congress appoints an electoral commission to immediately conduct an audit of the election results.

However, barring any new developments involving the evidence, Congress is unlikely to agree to their demand.

Trump, the first president to lose a reelection bid in almost 30 years, has attributed his defeat to widespread voter fraud, despite the consensus of nonpartisan election officials and even Trump’s attorney general that there was none.

Of the roughly 50 lawsuits the president and his allies have filed challenging election results, nearly all have been dismissed or dropped due to procedural issues such as lack of standing. However, none of the cases have yet been rejected on merit.

The convening of the joint session to count the Electoral College votes is usually routine. While objections have surfaced before—in 2017, several House Democrats challenged Trump’s win—few have approached this level of intensity.

On the other side of the Republican divide, Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, another possible 2024 contender, has urged his colleagues to “reject this dangerous ploy,” which he said threatens the nation’s civic norms.

Caught in the middle is Vice President Mike Pence, who faces growing pressure from Trump’s allies over his ceremonial role in presiding over the session Wednesday.

Several Republicans have indicated they are under pressure from constituents back home to show they are fighting for Trump in his baseless campaign to stay in office.

Sen. John Thune, the second-ranking Republican, told reporters at the Capitol

that leadership was allowing senators to “vote their conscience.”

Thune’s remarks as the GOP whip in charge of rounding up votes show that Republican leadership is not putting its muscle behind Trump’s demands, but allowing senators to choose their course. He noted the gravity of questioning the election outcome.

“This is an issue that’s incredibly consequential, incredibly rare historically, and very precedent-setting,” he said. “This is a big vote.”

Pence will be carefully watched as he presides over what is typically a routine vote count in Congress but is now heading toward a prolonged showdown that could extend into Wednesday night, depending on how many challenges are mounted.

A judge in Texas dismissed a lawsuit from Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, and a group of Arizona electors trying to force Pence to step outside mere ceremony and shape the outcome of the vote. U.S. District Judge Jeremy Kernodle, a Trump appointee, dismissed the suit late Friday.

To ward off a dramatic unraveling, McConnell convened a conference call with Republican senators Thursday specifically to address the coming joint session and logistics of tallying the vote, according to several Republicans granted anonymity to discuss the private call.

The Republican leader pointedly called on Hawley to answer questions about his challenge to Biden’s victory, according to two of the Republicans.

But there was no response because Hawley was a no-show, the Republicans said.

Hawley’s office said he sent an email afterward to his colleagues explaining his views.

In the email, Hawley said constituents back home are “angry and disillusioned” with the outcome of the election.

Adapted from reporting by the Associated Press

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