

# Biden Presses Ahead Toward Presidency as Trump Braces for Fight



Trump supporters outside the Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Virginia, U.S. on Sunday. , Bloomberg

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(Bloomberg) — President-elect Joe Biden is moving ahead with plans to address the coronavirus pandemic and shape his incoming administration, steps aimed at strengthening his claim on the White House even as President Donald Trump continues to dispute the results of last week's election.

Biden is largely ignoring Trump's efforts to undermine his victory. The president-elect plans to unveil on Monday his transition team's coronavirus task force, a step toward fulfilling his central campaign promise: He will make containing the pandemic his first priority.

He is in other ways methodically moving on with the work expected of a newly elected president, launching his transition, moving toward appointments to White House staff jobs, and giving a traditional victory speech on Saturday night. He seemed to acknowledge the sharp partisan divide in pledging to work for those who didn't vote for him, and saying he expected a good working relationship with Republicans in Congress.

Biden has so far won 290 Electoral College votes, according to the Associated Press, 20 more than required to clinch the nomination.

None of that has stopped Trump, who continued to question the results, fire off unfounded allegations of widespread voting irregularities, and alternate between claiming victory and saying he'd been robbed of a win.

Trump's reaction has frozen Republican officeholders — few have so far

acknowledged the win, though they aren't fully embracing Trump's position. White House staff have faced a leadership vacuum, fueled by another apparent coronavirus outbreak with Trump's chief of staff, Mark Meadows, among those now battling the virus.

Tellingly, the administrator of the General Services Administration, a Trump appointee, has so far not formally acknowledged that Biden won the election, as required under the 57-year-old Presidential Transition Act. Certification by the GSA administrator allows transition teams to fan across the federal government, access expanded office space, start tapping into \$6 million of funding and study detailed agency briefing books.

Former President George W. Bush, who is not a Trump supporter and has only spoken in particularly fraught moments over the last four years, sent a clear signal to the Republican Party to back away from the brink of outright denialism as Trump toys with a legal fight that could spur a transition crisis.

Bush issued a statement saying he had called Biden, whom he referred to as the president-elect, congratulated him and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on their victory, and offered his support during the transition. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice posted a similar message on social media.

Biden gave every indication to the American people and U.S. allies that he plans for a peaceful and smooth transfer of power. He said his mandate is to curb the pandemic, rebuild the economy, fight climate change, root out systemic racism and expand access to health care — and attempt to restore a bipartisan spirit in bitterly divided Washington.

## Control Covid

Biden won or is leading in states that could eventually award him 306 electoral college votes, far beyond the victory threshold of 270. Georgia appeared headed for a recount, but the trickle of votes in his favor has steadily solidified Biden's position in the core swing states.

In his speech Saturday, he took steps to highlight the biggest difference between him and Trump by focusing almost singularly on the pandemic in his first hours as president-elect.

“Our work begins with getting Covid under control,” Biden said in his victory speech on Saturday, before calling on Congress to work together. “If we can decide not to cooperate, then we can decide to cooperate, and I believe that this is part of the mandate given to us from the American people.”

Yet Trump dug in and expected Republicans to continue to fall in line. There was no evidence, except from a few like Utah Senator Mitt Romney, that their loyalty had waned despite Trump’s electoral defeat. The GOP is poised to retain its Senate majority, pending a pair of run-off elections in Georgia, and could balk at any Biden initiatives, including his push for Congress to consider a new coronavirus relief package even before he is sworn in on Jan. 20.

Democratic Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, a Biden ally, called on Trump to back talks for a new coronavirus relief package during the months before Biden is sworn in. “One way that President Trump can show some graciousness in the next 73 days during the transition is to publicly support a significant pandemic relief bill,” Coons told ABC on Sunday.

On the Sunday political talk shows, Republicans called for patience and investigations, though some acknowledged those efforts are unlikely to swing the result. Whether Trump’s camp will follow through with its threats to sue in places like Pennsylvania and Georgia and to demand a recount in Wisconsin — is unclear. Results in those states were narrow, but Trump didn’t appear to have enough of the outstanding votes to change the results.

The Trump campaign is raising money for a legal fight but also saying it could steer the funds toward retiring campaign debt. As of Sunday, there was a growing sense among Trump’s allies that he’d lost, but would still pursue certain legal challenges.

In his statement, Bush alluded to Trump’s right to request recounts and pursue legal challenges, but added, “The American people can have confidence that this election was fundamentally fair, its integrity will be upheld and its outcome is clear.”

## Golfing Weekend

Trump golfed Saturday and Sunday as his campaign continued to hold out hope for court victories that could turn the result. After rolling out a series of news

conferences and court cases late last week, the campaign was all but silent Sunday — declining to say what suits it might file. It tried to rally troops by plastering the campaign office with a fake newspaper image crowning Al Gore as president; the image was fabricated.

“You have the president sitting in the White House not acknowledging it, and I think there’s lots of Republicans who are trying to feel their way around that,” former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, a Trump adviser, told ABC’s “This Week.”

Symone Sanders, a senior adviser to Biden’s campaign, said the transition team will focus on preparing plans to move quickly on issues such as police reform and addressing climate change. Biden is also expected to quickly name his White House team, but cabinet positions are still weeks away.

“Joe Biden is going to make good on his promises on the campaign trail,” Sanders told CNN on Sunday. “We have a little over 70 days, so I hope folks give us a moment to pull it together.” Biden has pledged a range of first-day actions once inaugurated, including rejoining the Paris climate accord, reversing Trump’s regulatory cuts, and ending his travel ban on predominantly Muslim countries.

The White House had not yet reached out to Biden, Sanders said. “I think the White House has made clear what their strategy is here and that they are going to continue to participate and push forward these flailing and, in many respects, baseless legal strategies,” she said.

Biden’s coronavirus task force will be co-chaired by former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler, Biden deputy campaign manager Kate Bedingfield said. Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith, a professor of public health at Yale University, is another co-chair, according to a person familiar with Biden’s plans.

## Georgia Run-Offs

Coons said Biden would reach out to Republicans in Congress. “The only way we’re going to pass a big or bold package — either in the transition period or in the coming year — is with bipartisan support,” Coons said.

Much of Biden’s agenda will hinge on a pair of run-off Senate elections in

Georgia, a state Biden was leading by 10,000 votes on Sunday but where Republican incumbents outpaced their Senate challengers. Democrats would likely need both seats to reach a tie in the Senate, at which point Harris could break tie votes as vice president. Without that, Republicans are set to stymie Biden.

“I think it will be issue by issue, in terms of whether Republicans will work with Democrats, and vice versa,” Christie said.

“If there is a mandate, the mandate is, ‘We want people to work together,’” Republican Senator Roy Blunt told ABC. Romney, a frequent Trump critic, told CNN that Republicans would fight for conservative principles, and oppose measures such as the Green New Deal. Romney declined to say who he voted for.

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