



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on January 30, 2021

McConnell Intimidated by Backlash? Republican Leader Now Stonewalling Trump Conviction

Has the Republican establishment seen the writing on the wall if they go forward with convicting the impeached President Trump?

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) previously told colleagues he was open to convicting President Trump for allegedly inciting an “insurrection,” but in the days since has instead [made maneuvers](#) apparently aimed at hindering Democrats’ effort.

As it stands, there appears to be no path to convicting the former president. Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) on Tuesday introduced a motion to declare Trump’s second impeachment trial illegal on the grounds that he is no longer president. Ultimately, the motion got 45 votes from GOP senators.



Senator Mitch McConnell (AP Images)

Conviction takes 67 votes. The Senate currently has a 50-50 split between the two parties. Even if all 50 Democrats vote to convict, it would still take 17 Republican senators to get on board with the effort for it to happen, a possibility clearly unlikely in light of the vote on Senator Paul’s motion.

“Just do the math,” Senator Susan Collins (Maine), one of five Republicans to oppose Paul’s motion, remarked to reporters after the vote.

Associates of McConnell say he was “furious” after the January 6 breach of the Capitol. The Republican leader has continued to say he will have an open mind to legal arguments made during the trial.

Although McConnell wants the party to move away from President Trump and everything he stands for, the Kentuckian likely hopes to avoid a bitter fight within his own caucus over the conviction of Trump, who remains incredibly popular among the Republican base.

In the House, for instance, Representative Liz Cheney (R-Wy.) and other Republicans who voted to impeach President Trump have received heated pushback from voters and from fellow lawmakers.

A [petition](#) signed by more than half of House GOP members calls on Cheney to step down from her chairmanship of the House Republican Conference, a role that makes her the Number 3 member of her party in the chamber.

McConnell, moreover, took several actions prior to the vote on Rand Paul’s motion that made it likely the motion would succeed.

For example, McConnell’s leadership team told Senate Republicans on a January 21 conference call that Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts would not preside over the trial. Instead, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the Senate president pro tempore and senior Democratic senator, will preside.



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This bit of information solidified for Paul that the trial would be illegal, as the Constitution directs that the chief justice preside over it; moreover, the fact that a Democrat will preside lends to the belief that the whole thing is politically motivated.

Additionally, the vote on Paul's motion was curiously timed to take place right after GOP senators heard a presentation from George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley, a vocal critic of the impeachment effort.

One Republican senator told *The Hill* that the presentation "boxed" them in to supporting Paul.

Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), one of the five GOP senators who voted against Paul's motion, said she thought it was unfortunate that they were forced to vote immediately after Turley's presentation and before they could hear the other side of the argument.

"For a significant institutional question like this, to have this sprung upon us caused everybody to be a little bit flat-footed," she said.

"So we heard one side," she added. "I think just about everybody was quite surprised to be in a position to actually take not only a public position but a vote on this today."

Also, McConnell delayed the opening of the trial.

He declined Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer's (N.Y.) demands to reconvene the Senate from the January recess in time to begin the impeachment trial while President Trump was still in office.

The delay appears to have let anger over the January 6 storming of the Capitol cool off.

"That's McConnell's game. He knows the longer something waits, the more it fizzles," said a Senate GOP aide. "McConnell knows that if you wait on something, the sizzle goes out."

McConnell even bought more time by pushing for the House impeachment managers to wait until Thursday to present their article of impeachment to the Senate, which would have given Trump's defense team until February 11 to submit a pre-trial brief. Eventually, he and Schumer agreed that Trump would have until February 8 to submit the brief (the trial starts on February 9).

McConnell would [like nothing more](#) than to be rid of Donald Trump for good, but, as always for the cunning Republican leader, political expediency trumps personal feelings.

Nevertheless, Americans should realize that McConnell and his loyalists do not have the interests of the people in mind and should not let the Republican Establishment's recent overtures to stop a Trump conviction lead us into a false sense of security that these people are actually on our side.



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