

U.S. election delay? No, but organizations beware

President Trump knows how to create headlines by grabbing the most charged third rails of the moment. On Thursday, July 30, 96 days until the presidential election, he suggested the United States delay the election for the first time in the country's 244-year history.

No matter his motive, his tweet and subsequent remarks made this story line the top news of the day. Only Congress can delay the election under the Constitution. Leaders of both parties pushed back on his remarks. The House's Democratic leaders said a delay wouldn't be considered and Republican leaders, including the Senate majority leader, said the election would be held on Nov. 3.

The president has been sowing doubt about the validity of election results for many months, just as he did in the 2016 race. He asserts that mail-in ballots would lead to election fraud, despite research that shows that it increases participation and is expected to be in much wider use because of the COVID-19 pandemic. One in five votes for president was cast by mail in 2016 and there is no evidence from past elections that fraud is a widespread problem.

As a result of Trump's morning missive, **organizations have a new issue to consider and additional risk to manage** as we head into the fall. It's a reminder that we are in a **highly charged political atmosphere that will last for at least the next six months**.

The president's suggestion adds to the list of questions organizations could face about politics and the election.

- Does the company have a position on delaying the election?
- Does the company believe it should advocate for the use of mail-in ballots for the health and safety of its employees and stakeholders?
- Will your company change any Election Day plans it has for employees? Will get out the vote efforts include information on mail-in voting?
- Are you concerned about election fraud and/or no winner declared on Election Day that adds to the uncertainty the U.S. is already facing? George W. Bush's victory in 2000 was only decided after a Supreme Court ruling weeks after Election Day about how to count Florida's votes. Remember those "hanging chads"? While that was dramatic, 2020 could make that seem tame given the hyper-partisanship that exists today among politicians and the populace.

Organizations should develop answers to these questions and address their past political support. As part of this, they should:

- Audit campaign contributions by executives and PAC contributions
- Review statements that leaders made since the 2016 cycle expressing support for either party or candidate
- Prepare responses if asked by the press about political activity
- Determine if there is a need to change any policies for employee political engagement or if new guidelines should be set
- Take a fresh look at the organization's social media policy for employees and consider reminding them of the policy and potential issues associated with a bad post in a heated election environment

The focus on the election process comes in addition to those issues that are already on the table and challenging organizations this year, such as reopening the economy, racial equity and criminal justice reform. These issues will continue to swirl, and they will get more oxygen in the coming days when Joe Biden is expected to name his running mate and the race will heat up further.

For more information, contact the FH US Covid Task Force, US.CV.Taskforce@fleishman.com.