

New York judge delays Trump sentencing until after US election

AFP – Sentencing for Donald Trump in his New York hush money trial was delayed Friday until after November's election, a win for the Republican as he battles Kamala Harris in the knife-edge White House race.

The former US president had been scheduled to be sentenced on September 18 for falsifying business records in a scheme to silence a porn star's politically damaging story.

But Judge Juan Merchan postponed it to November 26 – three weeks past the November 5 election, as requested by Trump's lawyers.

“This is not a decision this Court makes lightly but it is the decision which in this Court's view, best advances the interests of justice,” he wrote.

The postponement comes as Trump and Democrat Harris prepare to face off on the debate stage next Tuesday in the already extraordinary presidential race.

Trump welcomed the sentencing delay, taking to his Truth Social platform to blast the case as a “witch hunt.”

“This case should be rightfully terminated,” he added.

– ‘Politically prejudicial’ –

Trump, 78, was convicted in May of 34 counts of doctoring business records to cover up hush money payments to porn star Stormy Daniels to stop her from disclosing an alleged sexual encounter ahead of the 2016 election.

The twice-impeached ex-president was originally scheduled to be sentenced on July 11.

That was delayed after the US Supreme Court ruled a former president has broad immunity from criminal prosecutions.

Trump's lawyers asked that his New York conviction be dismissed following the Supreme Court immunity ruling. Merchan said he would rule on the dismissal motion November 12.

Merchan noted Trump had asked for sentencing to be delayed "to avoid the potential 'politically prejudicial' impact that a public sentencing could have on him and his prospects in the upcoming election."

Hours earlier, Trump was in New York delivering rambling remarks about his myriad legal problems, as he denied multiple women's accusations of sexual harassment or assault.

"This is not the kind of publicity you like," Trump acknowledged at Trump Tower, even as he spent an hour, unprompted, reminding voters of the accusations of sexual assault by various women including the writer E. Jean Carroll.

– 'Interference' –

Trump's detailed remarks on the cases were surprising, given that he needs to win over groups like suburban women in the tight race against Harris, 59, who is aiming to become the nation's first woman president.

Trump was in court in New York earlier Friday over the Carroll case, in which he has been ordered to pay her \$5 million in damages for sexual assault and defamation.

"I never met her. I never touched her," Trump said, describing the case as "political interference."

The legal drama unfolded on the day the first mail-in ballots of the election were to be distributed.

The battleground state of North Carolina was scheduled to mail out around 130,000 absentee voting slips, marking the symbolic start of a nationwide process which during the bitter 2020 election saw 155 million Americans cast ballots.

However, a state appeals court halted the process after a last-minute lawsuit by independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr, who is seeking to have his name removed from ballots.

The fringe candidate from America's most famous political family has dropped out and endorsed Trump.

Other states will also soon mail out ballots, and early in-person voting begins across 47 states as soon as September 20.

Trump headed to North Carolina later Friday where the convicted felon received the endorsement of the nation's largest law enforcement union, the Fraternal Order of Police, and pledged to "bring back law and order" to the country.

"Kamala Harris and the communist left have unleashed a brutal plague of bloodshed, crime, chaos, misery and death upon our land," he warned, as he falsely claimed US crime has skyrocketed.

Harris for her part spoke to a Univision radio station, telling listeners "we need to turn the page on this Trump era."

She earned a key endorsement Friday – from Republican former vice president Dick Cheney who said: "There has never been an individual who is a greater threat to our republic than Donald Trump."

His daughter Liz Cheney, a conservative former congresswoman, publicly backed Harris this week, joining hundreds of other Republicans who like her father have put "country over party," said Harris campaign chair Jen O'Malley Dillon.

Harris's entry into the contest six weeks ago turbocharged

enthusiasm among Democrats, who had been despondent about President Joe Biden's chances of defeating Trump.

Her team announced Friday it raised \$361 million in August, the largest monthly haul of the cycle and nearly triple Trump's figure.

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