

Peaceful Transition of Power

Call to Action

In response to President Donald Trump's remarks concerning the peaceful transfer of power, which include "we'll see how it goes" and ordering the Proud Boys to "stand down and stand by," many Americans are concerned. The president continues to say that he has concerns about the election and mail-in-ballot fraud, even dismissing his FBI Director, Christopher Wray, who has said that there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud. The peaceful transfer of power that has become a hallmark of American Democracy and accepted practice of congress is under attack.

March 4, 1801, John Adams, the second president of the United States, quietly left Washington, D.C. during the early morning hours. He did not attend the inauguration ceremony held later in the day for Thomas Jefferson. The election of 1800 marked the first time the leader of one political party handed the reins of government to his opponent.

In that instance, Adams was setting an important precedent as his departure from office exemplified the first peaceful transfer of power in the United States. Since then, every U.S. presidential election has witnessed willing and peaceful surrender of power to the winner, despite any personal animosity or political divisions that might exist (Pruitt, 2020).

Our founding fathers, the constitutional framers, were aware of the articulated and well-documented flaws of the Articles of Confederation but wise enough to see beyond them. The founding delegates deliberated the existential question: Could the quarreling colonists be united under one enduring government? Most historical evidence pointed to a negative answer (Iannacci, 2016).

After the Convention, constitutional framers spoke about the danger of "factions" and the importance of respecting the norms and laws of constitutional government. In Federalist No. 10, James Madison acknowledged that "liberty is to faction what air is to fire," famously arguing that a large, representative democracy was the best way to counter groups of citizens "united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." (Iannacci, 2016)

Nicandro points out that the framers did not envision the modern party system; the Constitution makes no mention of political parties. However, they appreciated the need to moderate conflict between individuals and groups with strong political disagreements.

September 24, 2020, the 116th CONGRESS 2d Session passed **S.Res.718 - A resolution reaffirming the Senate's commitment to the orderly and peaceful transfer of power called for in the Constitution of the United States, and for other purposes.116th Congress (2019-2020)**. The resolution states:

RESOLUTION

Reaffirming the Senate's commitment to the orderly and peaceful transfer of power called for in the Constitution of the United States, and for other purposes.

Whereas the United States is founded on the principle that our Government derives its power from the consent of the governed and that the people have the right to change their elected leaders through elections;

Whereas our domestic tranquility, national security, general welfare, and civil liberties depend upon the peaceful and orderly transfer of power; and

Whereas any disruption occasioned by the transfer of the executive power could produce results detrimental to the safety and well-being of the United States and its people: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) reaffirms its commitment to the orderly and peaceful transfer of power called for in the Constitution of the United States; and

(2) intends that there should be no disruptions by the President or any person in power to overturn the will of the people of the United States.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-resolution/718/text>).

The fact that our political delegates have resolved to uphold the constitution's call for a peaceful transfer of power, this action maintains and reinforces the spirit of the constitution framers resolve to eliminate disputes between opposing groups. However, the peaceful transfer of power among the factional citizenry may not be so easily resolved. The President's direct orders to an identified hate group, the Proud Boys, raise considerable concern amidst a nation reeling from coast-to-coast civil unrest resulting in protest against racial injustices, specifically police brutality against unarmed Black people. There is no peaceful transition of power resolution between racial factional citizen groups, which pose a threat to the nation and many local communities.

Call for Action for Social Workers, and allies:

- Citizens, agencies, and organizations should contact their Senators to remind them to uphold their constitutional responsibilities and support the resolution concerning the peaceful transfer of power.
- Call for State and local government authorities to monitor the factional citizen groups in the aftermath of the election and to readily intervene in disputes or confrontations to prevent further escalation.
- Call on local, state, federal governments, and law enforcement entities to enforce current laws related to hate crimes, discrimination, and other social injustices.
- Call on community organizers, social action groups/organizations, and institutions of higher education, particular schools of social work, to actively engage in conflict resolution and advocacy for those in marginalized, underserved populations across the nation confronted by racial tension in the wake of the election.

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References

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- Pruitt, S. (2020). How John Adams established the peaceful transfer of power. History. <https://www.history.com/news/peaceful-transfer-power-adams-jefferson>
- S.Res.718. 116th Cong., 2D. (2020) (September 24, 2020). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th->