



Trump finally wears a mask

Bethesda | United States

U.S. President Donald Trump wore a face mask in public for the first time Saturday, finally yielding to intense pressure to set a public health example as the coronavirus rampages across America.

Trump had on a dark mask with the presidential seal as he walked through the corridors of Walter Reed military hospital outside Washington to meet wounded veterans.

Trump strode past reporters and did not stop to speak to them about what had become a hotly anticipated moment -- would he have a change of heart on a practice recommended by the government's own medical experts?

"I've never been against masks but I do believe they have a time and a place," Trump said as he left the White House.

News reports this week said aides practically begged the president to relent and wear a mask in public -- and let himself be photographed -- as coronavirus cases soared in some states and as Trump trailed Democrat Joe Biden badly in polls ahead of the November election.

Trump has steadfastly defended his administration's handling of the pandemic even though the United States is the hardest-hit country in the world.

The country has recently seen several days of more than 60,000 new cases, nearly 135,000 people have died and states have been left to figure out on their own how to reopen without a clear and coherent strategy from the White House.

'Wasted four months'

To wear a mask or not has become a sort of political fulcrum for a deeply divided America.

Conservatives who back Trump often refuse to don one on grounds it impinges on their freedom, while progressives tend to back the practice as a show of collective responsibility at a time of a life-or-death crisis.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend people wear masks in public when they cannot engage in social distancing.

But Trump -- at political rallies, media briefings and elsewhere -- has repeatedly avoided wearing a mask, even after staffers at the White House tested positive for the virus and as more aides, including Vice President Mike

Pence, have taken to wearing them.

In May, Trump even made fun of Biden when the latter started wearing a mask in public, sharing a tweet that featured an unflattering photograph of the former vice president in a black face covering.

The Biden campaign slammed Trump for not wearing a mask earlier.

"Donald Trump spent months ignoring the advice of medical experts and politicizing wearing a mask, one of the most impor-

tant things we can do to prevent the spread of the virus," Biden spokesman Andrew Bates said in a statement, according to NBC News.

"Rather than taking responsibility and leading, he wasted four months that Americans have been making sacrifices by stoking divisions and actively discouraging people from taking a very basic step to protect each other."

Trump has reportedly told aides that wearing a mask would make him look weak and he could not stomach the idea of letting the media photograph him in one.

Even Saturday as he left the White House to head to Walter Reed, Trump made it sound like he would wear a mask only because he would be in a hospital -- not that he had come around and embraced the idea of donning one regularly.

"I think when you're in a hospital, especially in that particular setting, where you're talking to a lot of soldiers and people that, in some cases, just got off the operating tables, I think it's a great thing to wear a mask," Trump told reporters.



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US President Donald Trump told reporters before leaving for Walter Reed medical center: 'I've never been against masks but I do believe they have a time and a place'

Jordan king says virus 'under control'

Amman

Jordan's King Abdullah II said yesterday that his country had successfully brought the novel coronavirus "under control" and that it was time to focus on restarting the economy.

"We have successfully dealt with the coronavirus, which today is under control in Jordan," he said during a meeting with prominent Jordanians.

"But like every country in the world we have paid an economic price, and the time has come to focus... on the economic situation," a palace statement quoted him as saying.

The desert kingdom, which has recorded 1,179 cases of the virus including 10 deaths, imposed a tough curfew enforced with drones to curb the spread of COVID-19, before easing poli-



Jordan's King Abdullah II, seen in this June 2020 picture, says the novel coronavirus in his country is "under control" and time has come to focus again on the economic situation

cies in early June.

King Abdullah said that Jordan would "come out stronger

(from the crisis) compared to other countries in the region". Health authorities have al-

most daily been reporting new cases among Jordanians and foreigners entering the country.

They have also maintained social distancing measures, made face masks compulsory in most public places and required newly-arrived travellers to wear electronic bracelets to ensure that they observe quarantine.

Before the coronavirus struck, Jordan hosted five million tourists a year, including at famous sites like Petra and Wadi Rum, bringing in \$5 billion last year.

But the vital sector, which employed some 100,000 people, has been battered by the pandemic and the ensuing lockdown restrictions.

King Abdullah acknowledged the impact of the crisis but said any decision to reopen would need to be "closely examined".

Trump ally Roger Stone still a criminal: Mueller

Washington

Donald Trump may have commuted Roger Stone's prison sentence but the president's longtime ally remains a convicted criminal, former special counsel Robert Mueller said Saturday.

Stone, 67, had been set to begin serving a 40-month prison term on Tuesday after his conviction on seven felony charges originally brought by Mueller as part of the Russia collusion probe.

The charges include tampering with a witness and obstructing the House investigation into whether the Trump campaign conspired with Russia to help him win the 2016 election.

In an op-ed piece in The Washington Post on Saturday, Mueller defended his probe as being of "paramount importance," dismissing White House claims that he was out to get Trump and those who worked with him.

"Stone was prosecuted and convicted because he committed federal crimes.

He remains a convicted felon, and rightly so," Mueller wrote as Democrats -- and two Republican senators -- piled on Trump for again intervening in the justice system to help an ally.

Senator Mitt Romney, who infuriated Trump when he became the only Republican to vote to convict the president in his impeachment trial, pulled no punches on Saturday.

"Unprecedented, historic corruption: an American president commutes the sentence of a person convicted by a jury of lying to shield that very president," he tweeted.

Another Republican senator, Pat Toomey, also criticized Trump but in milder terms, saying that as Stone has been duly convicted it was "a mistake" to commute his sentence.

Trump defended his Friday night move to commute Stone's sentence, saying Stone and others convicted of crimes in the Russia probe were caught up in a "witch hunt."

"They've all been treated unfairly, and what I did, I will tell you this: people are extremely happy, because in this country, they want justice," Trump told reporters.

Most Republicans have remained largely mute on the matter, while Democratic critics led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi unanimously condemned Trump.

'Staggering corruption'

"President Trump's decision to commute the sentence of top campaign advisor Roger Stone, who could directly implicate him in criminal misconduct, is an act of staggering corruption," she tweeted.

Pelosi called for legislation "to ensure that no president can pardon or commute the sentence of an individual who is engaged in a cover-up campaign to shield that president from criminal prosecution."

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden weighed in without mentioning Stone by name.

"I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Donald Trump is the most corrupt president in modern American history," he tweeted. "Every day that he remains in office, he further threatens the future of our democracy. We have to vote him out this November," Biden wrote.

The flamboyant Stone, a longtime political activist and consultant -- he even sports a tattoo of his former boss president Richard Nixon -- is easily recognized by his trademark dark glasses and bowler hat.

He and Trump were introduced in the 1980s and were said to have hit it off immediately.

Trump's action instantly brought new accusations that the president has intervened freely in the US justice system to help friends and allies, and to punish critics and perceived enemies.

In a highly unusual move in May, the US Justice Department moved to dismiss its own case against Michael Flynn, a former national security advisor to Trump, though he had pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI. A federal judge has demanded a further judicial review of the matter.

Stone was the first person directly involved in Trump's campaign to receive clemency. Indictment papers said a top Trump campaign official had dispatched Stone to get information from the WikiLeaks organization regarding thousands of emails hacked from Democratic accounts -- a leak that fueled Republican attacks on Trump's 2016 opponent, Hillary Clinton.

Trump has denied knowledge of any such outreach to WikiLeaks.



Roger Stone



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi



Anti-Trump protesters held up signs as the motorcade carrying President Donald Trump took him to the Trump National Golf Club in Sterling, Virginia