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Washington Weekly: First actions, two-year term and SCOTUS

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In January, former President Trump will become the 47th President of the United States, and the Republicans will retake control of the Senate. The UBS US Office of Public Policy takes a look at some key dates before the transition and assesses some of the things that the new government will try to address in their first weeks.

Finalizing the Election Results

The Electoral Process. While the presidential election provided a pretty quick and clear result, millions more votes on the West Coast still need to be counted in order to officially conclude this election season. It can be time-consuming to finalize elections when over 140 million people vote across the country and each state has its own systems for counting those votes. This is a key reason why inauguration day isn't for two and a half months after the election. Following this week's vote will be a technical (and largely unknown) process in law to ensure the vote count is certified and made official. The process includes the following milestones that need to occur before the presidential transition takes place.

—11 **December:** Each state must produce a certificate that names the electors chosen by the winning candidate for president in the state.

—17 **December:** The Electoral College will meet. Electors in all 50 states and the District of Columbia will meet and cast their ballots (one vote each for president and vice president). These results are then transmitted to the National Archivist and President of the US Senate.

—6 **January:** A Joint Session of Congress will meet, and the electoral votes will be read and counted before that joint session.

—20 **January:** President-elect Trump and Vice President-elect Vance will be sworn in and take office.

Forward Thoughts

Trump Two-Year Term. We all know that President Trump will have a four-year term, but the first two years may be the most impactful. He likely will have Republican control of both the House (still not certain) and Senate in 2025 and 2026. However, that could change following the mid-term elections in 2026. Given the close margins, Democrats could win one or both chambers and complicate the passage of Trump's agenda in those last two years. Much of what Trump wants to accomplish in areas like trade, national security, and regulation can be done through the executive branch and therefore over his entire four-year term. However, certain policy priorities (particularly extension of the 2017 tax cuts and government spending) will require congressional approval.

We can expect Trump to claim a mandate from voters and seek immediate action early next year on his cabinet and other senior official nominees, extension of the expiring provisions of his 2017 tax law, and certain immigration policies.

New SCOTUS Members? Will Trump get an opportunity to add his fourth or fifth nominee to the Supreme Court? Current Justices Clarence Thomas (age 76) and Samuel Alito (74) might consider retirement. If this were the case, it wouldn't result in a switch from the current 6-3 configuration in favor of court members appointed by Republican presidents, but it would prevent a Democratic president (if one is elected in 2028) from potentially replacing a retiring conservative with a young liberal on the court.

Approaching Thomas and Alito to check on their health and potential retirement plans will be a delicate exercise, but it seems likely to be on the new administration's to-do list.

First Trump Actions. Over the coming days and weeks, the President-elect will announce his cabinet selections. All of them will need to be confirmed by the Senate and that will keep the White House and Senate busy for the first couple of months of next year. While campaigning, Trump pledged a very ambitious action plan for day one that includes a closure of the US-Mexico border, deportations, new tariffs, and an overhaul of many of President Biden's executive orders and regulatory actions. The reality is that he will begin work on many or all of these activities, but he needs his appointees in place to implement and finalize that work within the agencies. He won't have that on the first day. We expect more symbolic proclamations on day one to include a review of all of Biden's executive actions and regulations, a review of current tariffs and trade policies with global partners (to be used as a basis for imposition of tariffs later), and the reimposition of his former policies on immigration that force migrants to seek asylum outside the US (rather than staying in the US while a court rules on their cases years later). Any deportations will focus on new migrants to the US and would require time to ensure the right resources are in place (which they are not now).

The President-elect will be constrained by many things on day one, and most of these top priorities will require time to be implemented.

For much more, see [Washington Weekly, 8 November 2024](#).

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