Trump promises $5,000 checks if Republicans win midterm elections, claims Congress may not be needed

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President Donald Trump opened the Republican Party's first-ever midterm convention in Dallas, Texas Wednesday night with a nearly two-hour speech centered on himself, attacks on his Democratic opponents and repeated warnings of an alleged communist takeover of the United States. He concluded with an extraordinary promise: if Republicans retained control of both the House of Representatives and Senate in the November elections, he would give every adult American citizen a $5,000 payment.

The convention has featured a parade of Trump's cabinet officials and political allies hailing the supposed successes of his second administration. Among those addressing the convention were Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Mehmet Oz, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Attorney General Todd Blanche. Kennedy appeared as his department oversaw a major resurgence of measles in the United States. As of September 3, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recorded 3,134 confirmed measles cases in 2026, while South Carolina became the site of the largest individual US measles outbreak in more than three decades.

Trump's fascistic speech ranged across the familiar themes of his political campaign: attacks on immigrants and Democratic politicians, denunciations of transgender people and repeated warnings about communism. In urging the audience to support Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's Senate campaign, Trump declared that electing Paxton was necessary to "defeat communism in America and vote for American freedom."

Expressing the fear of socialist revolution that haunts billionaires and fascists, Trump repeatedly described the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the world, as communist. "These people are radical left communists," he said. "The Democrat establishment has been overthrown and replaced by crazed lunatics and radicals. They call themselves Democrat socialists. But actually they're communists." Later, he warned that a Democratic victory could result in Congress being controlled by what he called a "communist caucus."

Against this backdrop, Trump presented his $5,000 bribe as the product of his administration's supposed economic success.

"Because the country is doing so well and because our country is making so much money that only I can make this promise to you," Trump said. "And here is my promise. If the Republicans win the House of Representatives and the United States Senate, both of them, because of our economic, tremendous economic success… I will issue a dividend to every adult citizen in the United States of America for $5,000."

"Very much like a successful company will do a cash distribution to its shareholders," he added.

With roughly 240 million adult citizens in the United States, a $5,000 payment to every adult would cost approximately $1.2 trillion. Trump offered no mechanism for financing or administering the payments in his speech.

On Thursday, Trump went further, telling CBS News Texas that he did not believe Congress would have to approve the payments. He claimed that the government had taken in "trillions of dollars" from tariffs and other sources and said the only condition he would impose was that recipients spend the money in the United States. How the government could enforce such a requirement Trump did not elaborate.

Trump's cash bribe raises a basic constitutional question. Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution provides that "no Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in

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Consequence of Appropriations made by Law." Trump has therefore proposed a payment potentially costing more than $1 trillion while simultaneously asserting that the executive branch could distribute the money without congressional authorization.

A bribe of $5,000 closely recalls the economic promises made by Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, the presidential candidate at the center of Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here.* The story depicts a fictionalized version of the US in which the fascist Windrip wins the 1936 presidential election in part by promising a $5,000 yearly stipend to American citizens.

Both demagogues, Windrip and Trump, are promising a large direct payment to Americans while at the same time presenting themselves, and their loyalists, as the only people who can restore the country's "greatness."

The $5,000 proposal is not the first time Trump has promoted a plan for direct payments to Americans that has subsequently failed to materialize. At the beginning of his second administration, he promoted a proposed "DOGE dividend" based on savings supposedly generated by the Department of Government Efficiency. He later promoted $2,000 tariff-rebate payments financed through revenue generated by his administration's tariffs. Neither proposal has resulted in a general payment to Americans.

The spectacle of Trump promising $5,000 payments to voters also recalls the increasingly direct role of billionaire wealth in American elections. The most prominent example is Elon Musk, who during the 2024 presidential election established a $1 million-a-day giveaway through his America PAC, offering the money to randomly selected registered voters in battleground states who signed a petition supporting the First and Second Amendments.

Musk's intervention did not end with the 2024 election. During the 2025 Wisconsin Supreme Court race, he handed out two $1 million checks at a Green Bay rally in support of the conservative candidate, Brad Schimel, while his America PAC offered $100 to anyone who signed a petition denouncing "activist judges." In July of this year, the Wisconsin Elections Commission voted 5-1 that there was probable cause Musk had violated the state's election bribery statute and referred the complaints for prosecution. On August 25, the special prosecutor appointed in the case announced that no charges would be brought, on the grounds that "nothing was given to individuals for voting."

Federal law explicitly prohibits offering expenditures to induce a person to vote, refrain from voting, or vote for or against a particular candidate.

The Republican convention continued Thursday in Dallas, with Trump scheduled to deliver another address on the second and final night of the event. One of the most striking moments of the first night, however, came not from a Republican, but from a Democratic senator.

Democratic Pennsylvania Senator John Fetterman appeared in a prerecorded video to introduce Republican Senator Dave McCormick, standing in front of a steel mill. Fetterman described McCormick as "a great American" and said he would work with Trump to "fight and defend the steel way of life." He presented himself as a "common-sense Democrat" and said, "I'm always going to stand with America. I'm always going to reject the extremes and socialism and that anti-American way of life."

McCormick thanked Fetterman for his "friendship" and "courage" following the video. The White House subsequently promoted the appearance on social media, describing Fetterman, in Internet slang popular among the extreme right, as "Based John Fetterman." Fetterman later reiterated that he remains a Democrat and said he would continue to support the Democratic caucus if it wins a Senate majority.

Fetterman's appearance is particularly notable given the support he received from the pseudo-left four years ago in his campaign. Fetterman had previously endorsed Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign, and during the 2022 Senate campaign Sanders returned the favor by actively soliciting contributions for Fetterman. *Jacobin*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the Democratic Socialists of America, published multiple favorable articles portraying him as a left-populist candidate and, in one headline, "the kind of political communicator the Left needs."

Four years later, Fetterman was appearing at Trump's Republican convention to introduce a Republican senator and denounce socialism. His message from the Republican convention was not a call for opposition to the administration, but a declaration that Democrats and Republicans could work together around Trump's trade war agenda.

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