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Outrage as Trump delays putting Harriet Tubman on \$20 bill until 2026

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Donald Trump's administration is facing criticism for delaying a move to put the anti-slavery activist Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill.

At a congressional hearing on Wednesday, the treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, said the planned redesign of the \$20, adding Tubman's face to the bill, will be postponed until after Trump leaves office. Tubman would be the first woman to feature on US banknotes for more than 150 years.

"Right now, I am focused on the security features of the US currency," he said. On the addition of Tubman's image, he added: "It's not a decision that is likely to come until way past my term, even if I serve the second term for the president, so I am not focused on that at the moment."

Barack Obama's administration announced that the \$20 bill would be redesigned by 2020, removing the face of Andrew Jackson, who is revered by some as the first populist president but who also owned slaves and pursued brutal efforts to drive Native Americans off their land.

But the treasury department has now postponed the final decision on a redesign until 2026, Mnuchin said, with new bills coming out no earlier than 2028. The \$10 and \$50 bills will be redesigned first with new security features to prevent counterfeiting.

Critics panned the decision.

"During her life, Harriet Tubman fought to make the values enshrined in our constitution a reality for all Americans – and it is far past time that we recognize her place in history. The administration's decision to drag their feet and delay the redesign of the \$20 until 2028 is unacceptable," said Representative Elijah Cummings, who together with the Republican representative John Katko introduced legislation to require the treasury to put Tubman's picture on the \$20. Katko said he was "disappointed" and urged the administration to reconsider.

"Today Mnuchin pathetically announces that Tubman on \$20 will be delayed till 2028 – meaning their goal is never," tweeted Gene Sperling, the director of the National Economic Council under Obama.

Even the conservative Cato Institute criticized the decision. "Harriet Tubman fought enormous injustice and promoted human liberty. She exhibited courage in fighting and breaking unjust laws, and took the lead in putting her views into action. She deserves to be on the \$20 bill," the group said in a tweet.

During his campaign for president, Trump criticized the decision to redesign the bill, calling it “pure political correctness”.

“Andrew Jackson had a great history, and I think it’s very rough when you take somebody off the bill,” he said, suggesting putting Tubman on another denomination, like the little-circulated \$2 bill, and leaving Jackson in place.

Tubman was an abolitionist who was born into slavery and escaped, later returning to help other slaves escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad.

At the hearing, Ayanna Pressley, a representative from Massachusetts, pressed Mnuchin on the status of the bill redesign. Treasury department officials have told the New York Times that he was eager to postpone the redesign past Trump’s term to avoid having him cancel it altogether.

“The American people understood the importance of representation on the banknotes of the world’s most powerful economy – representation that acknowledged our history and all those who have contributed,” Pressley said.

Mnuchin said the administration was focused on redesigning currency to prevent it from being counterfeited. “The ultimate decision on the redesign will most likely be another secretary’s down the road,” he said.

He declined to give his personal opinion on whether Tubman should be put on the banknote. “I can’t separate my personal opinion on these issues from the issue of the treasury secretary,” he said. “My position is that I am focused on my responsibility to deal with the security features.”