# Electoral College Voting Day Transcript

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**Adia Samba-Quee:** [00:00:00] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:04] Even though it is our job to understand it, even I sometimes need a reminder of how the Electoral College works. What do these people actually do? How is the Electoral College vote cast?

[00:00:16] Let's take one state, Montana.

**Jessie Kratz:** [00:00:22] There's literally three people that are meeting on December 14th to cast their vote for president and vice president.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:28] This is Jesse Kratz, historian of the National Archives.

**Jessie Kratz:** [00:00:32] So some states require that the winner of the popular vote gets their electoral votes and then some states is determined by political party. So the political parties will tell their candidate, their slate, their electors, you need a vote for Biden or you need a vote for.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:46] So if you're on the Republican Party slate and you're an elector from the state in which the popular vote went to the Republican Party's nominee, then you get to vote.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:53] And this vote happens on the second Monday after the first Tuesday in December, which in 2020 is December [00:01:00] 14th. The electors gather in legislative buildings in their respective states to cast paper ballots. This can be the secretary of state's office, the state capital, the governor's office, wherever state law tells them to meet.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:13] And if you are that Republican elector, then you're supposed to vote for the Republican nominee.

**Jessie Kratz:** [00:01:18] Some states have rules that the electors have to vote that way and other states don't.

[00:01:22] And they can vote however they want.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:26] Which I always found a little baffling because these electors are chosen by the party. So you'd think they would vote for the party candidate. But we do encounter what are called faithless electors, people who vote for a candidate other than the candidate who won the popular vote in their state.

**Jessie Kratz:** [00:01:41] Sort of rare because the electors are really chosen from the parties faithful. So it's really unlikely that they would switch their vote to the opposite party. But this happened in 2016. An example uses a lecture from Hawaii. It was supposed to vote for Hillary Clinton, but instead voted for Bernie Sanders. And this was totally legitimate because some states [00:02:00] have laws that the electors must vote for the popular vote winner. But Hawaii isn't one of them.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:04] And it is worth mentioning the Supreme Court did just issue a decision saying that it is constitutional for states to penalize faithless electors or to just nullify their votes.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:13] But if that vote checks out according to state law, here is what happens.

**Jessie Kratz:** [00:02:17] They vote for president and vice president and they vote on two separate ballots. And these are what we call certificates of vote. And this is the document that shows who the electors chose for president and vice president. And the electors have to sign, seal and certify these electoral votes. And then they send them to various officials, including the archivist of the United States.

[00:02:37] I think we get two copies of these.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:40] Election code in each state dictates how this actually plays out.

[00:02:43] Like in Massachusetts, the electors nominate and vote on who will be the temporary president, vice president and secretary of the Massachusetts Electoral College itself.

**2004 Massachusetts Electoral meeting:** [00:02:51] I rise to place a nomination for vice president of the Electoral College, the name of the Honorable Mushtaq Merza of Cambridge. [00:03:00]

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:00] It all varies state to state. You can actually watch these proceedings play out usually on C-SPAN. And my favorite aspect is the clothing, tuxedoes, sequined gowns, even tricorn hats. Electors really glam up for this moment.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:16] And unlike Election Day for general citizens, the college vote is not a secret ballot. You rise and declare who you'll be voting for, which also allows for a rare opportunity to lobby for what you believe in, even if what you believe in is abolishing the Electoral College.

**2004 Massachusetts Electoral meeting:** [00:03:32] Before I vote

[00:03:33] I would like to say we need an electoral system that reflects that respects the sanctity of the vote. Every vote should be counted and count every vote.

[00:03:49] And I dedicate myself to election reform.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:53] That's the end of the road for an elector's job, but it is not the end of the road for the vote itself. Those certificates have [00:04:00] to have to make their way to the Senate where the final steps cement our president. And we'll cover that on Civics 101. And don't forget, if you have a question about the way this democracy works, we will find the answer.

[00:04:11] Just ask us by clicking on the button at the top of our homepage at civics101podcast.org.