

After Trump visit, Republicans still divided on tax and border security plan

House and Senate Republicans are split on how to advance Donald Trump's agenda and hoped the president-elect would give Congress marching orders.

**By Jacob Bogage, Liz Goodwin and Dylan Wells
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Senate Republicans emerged from a closed-door meeting with President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday night no closer to a plan to implement Trump's campaign promises on border security, energy production and tax cuts, lawmakers said, as the GOP tries to keep an internal dispute from derailing Trump's early agenda.

With unified control of Washington, Trump and Republicans can route legislation around procedural obstacles and head off a Senate filibuster, giving them sweeping ability to remake much of the U.S. economy and federal government. But narrow margins, especially in the House, mean they can't afford to lose GOP votes along the way.

House Republicans have worked for months on plans to package all of Trump's priorities into a single, massive legislative package. The Senate GOP prefers splitting the proposals into two measures to chalk up an early Trump win on national security and energy production before moving into more complicated debates over taxes and spending.

Trump arrived in Washington on Wednesday ostensibly to mediate the dispute and give congressional Republicans direction. But in the meeting, multiple senators, including Majority Leader John Thune (R-South Dakota), pressed Trump to adopt the two-bill approach, and Trump repeatedly responded that he backed the request from House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) for one but remained open-minded.

The result, lawmakers said, was a meeting that was mostly a question-and-answer session to fete the president-elect, who told reporters afterward that either legislative approach worked for him.

"Whether it's one bill or two bills, it's going to get done one way or the other. I think there's a lot of talk about two, and there's a lot of talk about one, but it doesn't matter. The end result is the same," Trump said.

Trump campaigned on a promise of mass deportation of unauthorized immigrants, a border security crackdown, new defense spending and extending his multitrillion-dollar 2017 tax

cuts with new breaks for big businesses and individuals. Those policies could be very costly, and many GOP budget watchdogs favor pairing those policies with deep cuts to the federal government.

Then-presidential nominee Donald Trump speaks to journalists at the U.S.-Mexico border in Montezuma Pass, Arizona, in August. (Tom Brenner for The Washington Post)

But internal Republican battles over the nation's borrowing limit, which the government is set to hit this spring, and annual spending caps have clouded the path for the GOP.

House Republicans met earlier in the day to formulate plans for their one-bill approach. The GOP's thin majority in the lower chamber means a small group of dissenters could shatter the consensus needed to pass the bill. House leadership has tried to impress the gravity of their narrow margins upon Trump and the Senate, but with limited success.

"The House Republican Conference is broad and wide, over 200 people with lots of different opinions and dynamics in their districts at home," Johnson said Wednesday afternoon. "You've got to take that into account, and we will. And so I think if you put all the measures into one package, it increases greatly the probability of us achieving all of those objectives. And that's why we've been focused on the one-bill strategy."

But Johnson signaled after that gathering that congressional Republicans were still a distance away from finalizing their approach.

"This is two chambers deciding the best sequence of events," he said, "and we'll get to perfect alignment here in the next couple of days."

In the Senate, Thune, Budget Chair Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) all argued that the Senate should take up and quickly pass a narrower bill that would include more than \$100 billion in border security funding to deliver Trump a quick win on a core campaign promise, according to Sen. John Hoeven (R-North Dakota).

Hoeven told Trump he believes lawmakers should set up a "horse race" between the two chambers — allowing the Senate to work on the border bill while the House toils away on the one "big, beautiful bill" Trump has asked for.

"It doesn't have to be a mutually exclusive process," Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) said.

Trump added that he wanted the Republican conference to stick together on his nominees, a handful of whom have drawn concern from more moderate GOP senators. He also brought up his desire for Greenland to join the United States, according to several lawmakers, and his plan to pressure Canada with tariffs.

Donald Trump Jr. went to Greenland this week in his personal capacity to promote his business interests.

“Greenland, if you look at the people, we got applause when we landed yesterday. I had my representatives, my son, Don, and representatives go there, and it was like a love fest,” the president-elect told reporters.

Hannah Knowles contributed to this report.