

Johnson quietly shops new budget blueprint

The rough plan would cut less spending than hard-liners want while also scaling back potential tax cuts.

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After a series of setbacks and delays, Speaker Mike Johnson on Monday night shopped around a new budget blueprint, snatching the pen from Rep. Jodey Arrington amid mounting frustration with the House Budget Committee chair.

Johnson's latest plan includes a new floor for spending cuts — between \$1.25 trillion and \$1.5 trillion — to offset part of the massive domestic policy package Republicans are now pursuing, according to four people granted anonymity to provide details on the private talks. That range of reductions is greater than what the speaker initially laid out to his conference last month but still lower than the \$2.5 trillion some conservatives have been pushing for.

The level of cuts is just one of several moving pieces Johnson and other House GOP leaders are still struggling with as they try to build unity for the sweeping border, energy and tax package. They want to use special budget reconciliation procedures to pass the bill along party lines, but first they need to get Republicans almost completely united behind a budget framework, and they have already blown past an informal deadline to get that blueprint through committee.

The Senate is prepared to move forward with a competing budget plan, one Johnson strongly opposes, later this week.

In another major adjustment, the speaker's new draft plan could give the Ways and Means Committee even less fiscal space to craft an expansive package of tax cuts. Republicans had agreed to a [\\$4.7 trillion instruction](#) during their White House meeting on Thursday, but that number is now expected to dip lower — a move certain to concern GOP members who are [already worried](#) they won't be able to fit all of President Donald Trump's tax priorities into the bill.

Johnson continued to circulate the plan with key House GOP factions late Monday, with the floor for spending cuts likely to land closer to \$1.5 trillion. If those talks go well, he is expected to present the new budget plan at a closed-door House Republican Conference meeting Tuesday morning, two of the people said.

First, however, GOP leaders have to make sure their own budget chair is fully on board. During a huddle on the House floor Monday night, Johnson, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise and other senior Republicans pressed Arrington on what his more

conservative committee members would think of the new leadership-led plan — assuming that he'd broken the ice with the hard-line conservatives on the panel.

Arrington indicated he didn't know, leaving some senior Republicans concerned that he wasn't doing enough to advocate for the plan with the hard-liners. Senior Republicans also pressed Arrington on what he would say about the plan in the Tuesday morning conference meeting, given that Johnson wanted Arrington to deliver part of the presentation.

Some Republicans were worried Arrington might stir up opposition given that he's shown sympathies toward conservative causes in private meetings. Arrington and fellow Texan Rep. Chip Roy have been [privately warring](#) against Ways and Means Chair Jason Smith and other senior Republicans in recent days over Trump's tax cuts and how to pay for them.

"They're very worried that they'll present the plan and Jodey will get questions as budget chair and will not back leadership up," a senior GOP aide said, adding: "This all stems from a leadership-Jodey Arrington beef. Jodey's been really tough to nail down: Is he with leadership? Or is he with the rank-and-file budget members who are pushing back? Nobody can figure it out."

A spokesperson for Arrington did not immediately respond to inquiries Monday night.

To be sure, Johnson is not sidelining Arrington entirely. Leaders still hope to move the budget plan through his committee, perhaps as soon as this week, and they expect the chair to take the lead in ironing out key details. But they have been concerned that he's taking too long, and with Senate Republicans moving their own bill through committee this week, some in House GOP leadership are increasingly worried about getting jammed.

They're so fearful, in fact, that some Republicans have privately started speculating about whether they should cancel next week's House recess to force progress on the budget — though so far there's no indication that leadership would do so.

As recently as Friday, GOP leaders and conservatives thought they had a tentative deal to cut as much as \$2 trillion in spending as part of their party-line domestic policy package. But Trump's aversion to steep cuts across Medicaid has emerged as a sticking point behind the scenes.

GOP leaders told senior Republicans in a series of private meetings Monday that Trump wasn't yet on board with the major Medicaid cuts it would take to secure up to an additional \$800 billion in savings, according to three people familiar with the conversations who, like the others, were granted anonymity to describe the private talks.

Johnson and senior Republicans are wary of pursuing the Medicaid reforms only for Trump to publicly bash the move. GOP leaders indicated in private meetings Monday

that “they need to work with Trump” on the Medicaid issue before proceeding, according to one of the people.

But Trump and his team are worried those cuts will invite political blowback. And, many House Republicans in competitive and even some safer seats are alarmed at the idea of slashing Medicaid, even if they don’t directly cut individual benefits.

“Trump’s team has said he does not want to make this bill a health care bill,” said the aforementioned senior GOP aide. “They don’t want anything too drastic on health care or savings because that becomes the talking point.”

Johnson has also been considering adding a debt limit increase back into the reconciliation plans since the White House meeting last Thursday, given a push by Trump. However, the speaker and other GOP leaders remain privately skeptical it can advance in a party-line package.

With that decision still unsettled — not to mention the parameters for spending reductions and tax cuts — senior House Republicans think it is unlikely the plan could move through the Budget Committee this week, as Johnson had hoped.