

GOP Holdouts Force Delay in Vote on Trump Budget Plan

Critics say the framework doesn't lock in sufficient spending cuts

By Richard Rubin and Olivia Beavers
Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON—Republican leaders postponed a vote on the blueprint for President Trump's "one big, beautiful bill," throwing the [GOP legislative agenda](#) into temporary uncertainty as they try to find a path forward on tax cuts and spending.

A handful of hard-right conservatives resisted the pleas from Republican leaders and Trump, who had urged wavering House members to "close your eyes and get there." The holdouts argued that the plan that came out of the Senate on Saturday didn't lock in nearly enough spending cuts alongside extensions of expiring tax cuts.

Three times earlier this year, Trump had been able to sway just enough House members on close votes, getting Mike Johnson (R., La.) re-elected as speaker, maneuvering a spending bill through Congress, and passing the first version of a budget. This time around, the playbook hasn't worked yet.

Key members of the holdout group met with top Republican senators and then with Johnson for more than an hour. Those sessions yielded progress, lawmakers said, but they didn't produce enough of a breakthrough to get the budget adopted Wednesday. Trump didn't speak to the holdouts directly. Instead, Johnson said he had a brief conversation with the president, filling him in on the negotiations as Trump headed to an event.

Johnson said late Wednesday that a vote could come Thursday, in advance of a scheduled two-week congressional recess. And he said the House might cancel part of that recess if needed.

"There's a very good, healthy spirit of cooperation and discussion," Johnson said, citing frequent conversations with Senate GOP leaders. "This is a productive part of a legislative process."

Lawmakers are considering several possible options. One would change the House rules to forbid an eventual tax-and-spending bill from violating the House's tighter budget restrictions, which limit the size of tax cuts unless spending is also cut. That

change could allow the budget to be finished Thursday but a future House majority could change or waive that rule.

The House could also amend the Senate budget or seek a House-Senate conference committee. Those options would be more binding than a House rule change but would take longer to execute and require the Senate to vote again.

Republican leaders are regrouping as they try to find a path forward. GOP lawmakers are largely united around extending expiring tax cuts, adding new tax cuts and boosting spending for border security and national defense. But they are at odds over budget deficits and spending cuts, and Wednesday's delayed vote might force them to confront the divides between the House and Senate that they have been sidestepping until now.

"I support the president. I trust the president," said Rep. Andy Ogles (R., Tenn.). "I do not trust the Senate. I've seen this movie. I know how it ends. Why are we going down this path? It's like Lucy and the football. She pulls it away every time."

The [Senate's fiscal framework](#) allows more than \$5 trillion in tax cuts and locks in \$4 billion in spending cuts. Senators say they are aiming for \$2 trillion in spending cuts but wanted to allow maximum flexibility. Trump posted on social media on Tuesday that he favors major spending cuts, "hopefully" over \$1 trillion.

The House version, passed in February without a single vote to spare, allows \$4 trillion in tax cuts and requires \$1.5 trillion in spending cuts, largely from the committee that handles Medicaid. The House's tax cuts could get larger if spending cuts get larger. Those same spending cuts could imperil the Senate coalition because members such as Sens. Josh Hawley (R., Mo.) and Lisa Murkowski (R., Alaska) are concerned about Medicaid.

The House budget would allow for a \$4 trillion debt limit increase; the Senate version allows \$5 trillion. The U.S. is likely to run out of ability to pay all its bills by August or September without a debt-limit increase, and that deadline might become the deadline for the big tax-and-spending bill.

This week's framework contains the House and Senate numbers, but the Senate figures are more important. The House can effectively change its numbers later with a simple-majority vote while the Senate would need 60 votes in a chamber that Republicans control 53-47.

Lawmakers who object to the Senate plan, including Reps. Lloyd Smucker (R., Pa.), David Schweikert (R., Ariz.) and Chip Roy (R., Texas), say they want to lock in

minimum levels of significant spending cuts in writing now. They argue that party leaders' and senators' assurances about cuts coming later in the actual tax-and-spending bill aren't good enough.

"We're going to end up on the short end of the stick," Roy said on the House floor, warning that a final bill from the Senate would increase budget deficits. "Show me the math. At some point, if you're in Congress, pass a math test. Because the Senate bill doesn't add up."

Republicans have a 220-213 House majority, so they can lose only three members on any vote, if all Democrats are opposed. Democrats say the Trump agenda would cut spending on healthcare for Americans to fund tax cuts for the wealthy.

"He wants all of you guys to close your eyes and kiss his ass," Rep. Jim McGovern (D., Mass.) said Wednesday. "And I'm pretty sure that you're all about to do just that. What an embarrassment."

Republican leaders contend that the framework is merely the first step and that GOP lawmakers can object later if a final bill doesn't reduce enough spending.

"You want to stop now and trigger the largest tax increase in American history? Or do you want to keep moving? This is the process bill," said Rep. Tom Cole (R., Okla.), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. "You should wait and see what the final bill is before you make a call."

In the past, Trump has swayed wavering members, calling the House cloakroom during votes to move the final few holdouts. He posted on social media Wednesday urging Republicans to get on board, and party leaders are pushing for action fast.

Smucker said he has told party leaders that he can't vote for the Senate plan unless there are changes to the text.

"You have to put guardrails in place, in writing, at the beginning of the process," he said.