

# [***Why the GOP wants to impeach Mayorkas but not pass the border deal***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B8G-8PB1-JBSS-S00B-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 6, 2024 Tuesday 5:00 AM GMT

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**Length:** 1795 words

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**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Choosing governance over grievance rarely works in [*Donald Trump's*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45) Republican Party.

Oklahoma's James Lankford, who produced the Senate's most conservative [*immigration plan*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/04/politics/senate-border-foreign-aid-bill/index.html) in decades after tortuous talks with Democrats, is learning this lesson with the deal appearing [*close to collapse*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/05/politics/border-deal-senate-vote/index.html) Monday a day after it was unveiled.

"This is a very bad bill for his career," the ex-president said Monday, delivering an ominous warning to a red-state senator who could find himself out in the cold with the White House and his own political base if Trump wins the 2024 election.

Trump's words, on The Dan Bongino Show, caused a Washington whiplash as GOP senators quickly rationalized their political interests and peeled away. By dinner time, a majority of Senate Republicans were leaning against the measure or were resolved to vote it down, meaning a filibuster-proof majority looked impossible, according to CNN sources.

"I think the proposal is dead," said Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker after a meeting in Republican leader Mitch McConnell's office. House Speaker Mike Johnson had already said the deal was dead on arrival in the GOP-controlled House.

The showdown over the southern border crisis reflects Trump's growing power as he closes in on the Republican nomination and openly seeks to scupper any action by Washington that could ease [*President Joe Biden's*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) discomfort on the issue and diminish his own capacity to demagogue immigration as November's election beckons. And it's a reminder that Trump's influence is fostering the GOP infighting that has imperiled action on most of the major issues facing Congress, including continued US military assistance to Ukraine.

Trump always looks to foster chaos, but immigration is especially vital to his political strategy - it was the polarizing issue that powered his political rise in 2015 and remains a driving force of his political movement. That's why, despite the GOP-controlled House taking steps to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas over immigration this week, there's little appetite among the party for a bill that might be in the national interest but that could alienate the past and possibly future president. Even with the conservative Border Patrol union backing the bill, it's much easier for Republicans to join those misrepresenting the bill as "amnesty" - the code word that has long sunk immigration compromises in Washington. And in a pro-Trump party that feeds off its synergy with conservative media, the biggest incentives lie in Trump's stunt-style ***politics*** rather than seeking bipartisan political compromises.

Lankford is not the only high-profile Republican to find out that attempting to forge even conservative solutions is hazardous in a party increasingly in thrall to Trump's whims.

Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy authored his own political demise, despite years of cozying up to Trump, by using Democratic votes to stave off a federal government shutdown last September. A governing crisis would have hurt millions of Americans. But it would also have created the kind of mayhem that Trump cites as the justification for the return of a strongman wielding unchecked executive power. After his toppling, the former speaker warned his party had utterly rejected the give-and-take of ***politics*** that the founders saw as the only way a restive nation of states could bind together. "I don't regret standing up for choosing governance over grievance," McCarthy said back then. "Our government is designed to find compromise," added the California Republican, who has since left Congress.

Lankford, who was reelected to a new six-year term in 2022, is far more secure than McCarthy. But he is facing a similar problem. His compromise - even one that hands Republicans much of what they usually demand - appears futile. "My job is trying to solve the border problem," said the Oklahoma senator, a member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Referring to Trump, Lankford told CNN's Manu Raju on Monday: "His job is to run for president. My job is to serve the nation."

Biden's political vulnerability over immigration

There's a strong political case that Biden waited too long to show his recent urgency to address an influx of migrants at the US-Mexico border that caused a huge backlog and overwhelmed the capacity and resources of the system. Many Republicans argue the president didn't sufficiently enforce existing laws to deal with the flow of migrants. But with his reelection hopes under threat, and the issue emerging as a perilous one for Democrats nationwide, Biden was ready to accept far tougher immigration measures than Democrats normally would. This is despite growing anger on Biden's left that has raised questions about the durability of his coalition in November.

The new legislation, for example, does little to address the fate of Dreamers, people who were brought illegally to the country as children but have no legal status. In a striking change of tone, the president even said he'd be willing to shut down the border if Congress gave him the power to do it. A person familiar with the White House's position on the bill argued Monday that the bill was not designed to be the kind of comprehensive package that failed under the Barack Obama and George W. Bush presidencies but was specifically targeted at the border issue. Security at the border has traditionally been the top Republican concern. But even the toughest measures a Democratic president has accepted in years weren't sufficient.

After demanding action for months on the border, GOP now seems set to walk away.

"This is a humanitarian and security crisis of historic proportions, and Senate Republicans have insisted not just for months, but for years, this urgent crisis demanded action," McConnell said Monday. The Kentuckian is a hardline conservative and a scourge of Democrats but has nevertheless sometimes sought to govern during his long spell as leader. But the latest immigration debacle is highlighting his waning control over the increasingly Trumpy Senate GOP.

Bill would mean a huge change in the law

The border compromise would represent a dramatic change of immigration law on lines many Republicans have long supported. It is designed to cut the asylum process - which can last five years or more and leaves many migrants living in the US - to around six months. It raises the legal standard of proof to pass initial asylum screenings. It would channel billions of dollars to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and to states to deal with the influx of immigrants.

The bill would give the government authority to restrict border crossings if daily average migrant encounters hit 4,000 over a one-week span. If crossings rise above 5,000 on average per day on a given week, the Department of Homeland Security would be required to use authority that would effectively result in DHS largely barring migrants who cross the border from seeking asylum. Republicans, seeking to derail the bill, on Monday claimed that the measure would therefore guarantee 5,000 migrant encounters per day. But that is a misrepresentation. The person familiar with the White House's position said the threshold was envisaged as an emergency trigger and that other changes in the bill were designed to ensure that it was never reached and that future bottlenecks in the asylum process could not occur.

But for many Republicans, there is no room to compromise.

"It should be zero encounters," Tennessee Rep. Tim Burchett told CNN's Jake Tapper on Monday. "We should not be letting anybody into our country."

Johnson, who has been in close contact with Trump but insists he's not taking orders from the ex-president, is demanding the passage of H.R. 2, a measure that critics claim would make genuine asylum claims from migrants fleeing persecution almost impossible and would involve indefinite detentions of minors and families with rudimentary access to legal counsel or representation. H.R. 2 won only GOP support when it passed the House and all those who voted for it knew there was never a chance it could get through a Democratic Senate and White House.

But it sent a powerful message to Republican voters and the ex-president, who is exploiting the immigration issue in his campaign. The Mayorkas impeachment effort sends a similar message to Trump's base, but it will have zero practical impact on the crisis at the southern border and could force Republicans in swing districts to take a tough vote.

How the showdown started

The current drama had its roots not just in the border crisis but in the Republican Party's increasing hostility to send aid to Ukraine - mirroring another Trump position - and the House's refusal to endorse Biden's latest $60 billion arms package to the country. "Any national security package has to begin with the security of our own border," Johnson said in December. "When we go home to our town halls, they ask us a very important question: how can we be engaged in securing the border of foreign countries if we can't secure our own? That is the question the White House has to help us answer."

The package on the table is part of the White House's answer to that question - even if it's not everything a hardline Republican might demand.

But unless something changes, the House GOP has effectively decided it's not going to spend money on either critical priority - the southern US border or Ukraine.

That's because Trump has left little doubt that he has no interest in a pre-election fix to the immigration issue, which he uses to harangue Biden at every campaign stop and to claim inaccurately that the border is open to droves of invaders. "Only a fool, or a Radical Left Democrat, would vote for this horrendous Border Bill," the ex-president wrote on Truth Social on Monday. "This Bill is a great gift to the Democrats, and a Death Wish for The Republican Party." Trump has previously claimed terrorists are coming across the southern border, posing a national security threat. So it's strange that someone running to be commander in chief is willing to leave the situation as it is until he hopes to return to power in January.

While the failure of another immigration compromise might imperil Biden's reelection, his rhetoric in recent weeks has at least positioned him to turn the tables on Trump.

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, one of the Democrats involved in compromise negotiations, previewed one attack line against the ex-president on Monday night.

"This is the chaos when Donald Trump is back in charge of the Republican Party," Murphy told CNN's Wolf Blitzer.

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**Load-Date:** March 7, 2024

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