

# [***Trump emerges as new obstacle to Senate immigration deal as GOP tension grows***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B4H-HY81-DY7V-G016-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Senators working feverishly to cut a high-stakes immigration deal are now running into a new problem: Former President Donald Trump.

Trump allies on Capitol Hill have privately lobbied the former president to come out vocally against any Senate compromise as he rails on immigration on the campaign trail and has little appetite for giving President Joe Biden a victory on the hot-button issue.

And after Trump publicly lambasted a potential Senate deal, GOP critics and supporters of the former president were in unison: Trump's position will make it perilous - if not impossible - for a wide-swath of Republicans to get behind any bipartisan deal. And that could have the effect of derailing the package altogether, which would include emergency aid package for Ukraine and Israel.

"That I think is going to weigh in heavily," said Rep. Mike Braun, an Indiana Republican, who backs Trump, said of the former president's influence and expected opposition to a deal.

"It's not helpful," said Senate GOP Whip John Thune, the No. 2 Republican in the chamber, who is neutral on the 2024 presidential race.

"There are some folks without question that don't want to get any solution to a problem because they think that might help the other side," GOP Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, a Trump critic, told CNN. "You think Donald Trump has influence on ***politics***? Yeah."

Senate leaders are pressing for a vote as soon as next week on the national security package, even though there is no deal or legislative text yet, and as a trio of senators are still furiously negotiating a deal after weeks of talks.

But many House Republicans are already rejecting the plan out of hand, even as they have yet to see any details of the deal. And if Trump were to oppose the deal, as is widely expected, it would make it harder for on-the-fence Republicans to side with Biden over Trump on an issue central to the 2024 campaign.

"It makes it harder because there are a lot of people that take their lead directly from him," said Sen. Kevin Cramer, a North Dakota Republican who supports Trump's candidacy.

Indeed, any Senate deal is bound to fall short of the House GOP's plan, known as HR 2, given Democrats' opposition to many of the provisions in the package. And already, many House Republicans say they can't support any deal that doesn't mirror HR 2, a position that has frustrated top Senate Republicans who say their party should be ready to compromise if it means that a bipartisan deal could help reduce the flow of migrants at the southern border.

"You have to make hard choices sometimes in ***politics*** and in life," said Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican and close ally of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. "And here the question is, 'Do you want to get something that will help us stem the tide of humanity coming across the border and drugs? Or do you want to get nothing?'"

But Trump said House Speaker Mike Johnson should only accept a deal that is "PERFECT ON THE BORDER," he wrote in all-caps on his social media page.

"I do not think we should do a Border Deal, at all, unless we get EVERYTHING needed to shut down the INVASION of Millions and Millions of people," Trump wrote Wednesday night on Truth Social.

Johnson, who has spoken to Trump about the immigration talks in recent days, would not respond on Thursday when asked about the former president's comments. But he has repeatedly pushed for the House's bill and has not committed to putting a Senate package on the floor.

Republicans close to Trump say that's the message they want him to send.

"I'm encouraging President Trump to oppose the contours of the Senate deal such that I've seen in," said Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a close ally of the former president's.

Trump allies say the former president is right to be opposed to doing something now and argue that the only way to get strong border policy is to get Biden out of the White House.

"I really think that if you want to change what is happening with the border, you are going to have to change administrations," said Sen. Josh Hawley, a Republican from Missouri who recently endorsed Trump's White House bid.

GOP Rep. Troy Nehls of Texas, a staunch Trump backer, said of cutting a deal with Biden: "So now it's 11 months, 10 months before a general election and now you want to work with Republicans to do something about the southern border? I'm hesitant to be quite honest."

Senate negotiators have spent months trying to cut a deal on border policy that would raise the credible fear threshold for individuals seeking asylum in the US, curtail the administration's use of granting parole and give the US greater ability to swiftly deport migrants at the border.

But the deal, which is still being negotiated, is expected to be less far-reaching than the House's border bill, HR-2, which would have resumed construction of Trump's border wall and given the Department of Homeland Security far more authority to turn away migrants at the border.

The moment looks similar to 2013 when the Senate approved a comprehensive immigration bill that never came to the floor in the House as then-Speaker John Boehner faced pressure from this right flank. But this deal would lack provisions - sought by Democrats - to provide a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants, nor would it deal with the so-called "Dreamers," who came to the US illegally as children.

Instead, Democrats are ready to give in to many GOP demands for more restrictive policies because Republicans have made their support of roughly $60 billion in aid to Ukraine contingent on tougher immigration laws.

Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, the top Republican negotiator in the border security talks, said he has not engaged with Trump during the negotiations and seemed surprised by Trump's reaction. He said he didn't know why Trump spoke out now.

Lankford said he doesn't interpret Trump's comments to mean it "has to be HR 2 or nothing."

Asked if he's concerned Trump would have the power to kill the bill, Lankford said: "I think everyone is going to look at it and have to evaluate it, including him, obviously, and the people around him, to be able to determine, does this provide me new authorities, or are these things I've been looking for that he didn't have when he was president last time that will be helpful for the next time."

"He's not had the opportunity to see the text," Lankford said of Trump.

Others were critical of Trump's comments.

Sen. Susan Collins, the Maine Republican, called Trump's comments "very unfortunate."

She added: "Securing our border is absolutely imperative and assisting Ukraine as it degrades the army of one of our greatest adversaries is also imperative."

Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican, sympathized with Johnson for having to deal with a "wheelbarrow full of frogs" in the House.

But Tillis added: "I think anybody who stands against this needs to own 3-5 million more people coming across the border in the next 12 months. And if we lose the opportunity to win the White House, then that also means another 8-10 million over the next five years. That should weigh heavily on people's minds."

And Tillis offered a blunt warning to conservatives willing to scuttle a Senate deal.

"When the bill is released and everyone - especially conservatives and President Trump - sees the tools that will be available to a President Trump should he win the election, to lose this opportunity to get it into law, I think is malpractice," Tillis said Thursday.

CNN's Sam Fossum and Morgan Rimmer contributed to this report.

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