

# [***House and Senate Jockey for Control as Biden Pushes for Border-Ukraine Deal***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B4D-BPW1-DY68-1000-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** President Joe Biden invited congressional leaders to the White House on Wednesday to discuss solutions to the top questions facing U.S. national security.

**Body**

President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) met with the four Congressional leaders on Wednesday to discuss ways to secure a bipartisan national security deal that would fund border enforcement efforts and unlock military aid for Ukraine.

While [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Majority Leader [*Chuck Schumer*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/chuck-schumer?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), Senate Minority Leader [*Mitch McConnell*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mitch-mcconnell?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and House Minority Leader [*Hakeem Jeffries*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hakeem-jeffries?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) are united in their support for Ukraine, House Speaker [*Mike Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), who leads the Republican-controlled lower chamber, has been noncommittal regarding continued aid to the embattled European country, insisting the border must be dealt with first.

However, Johnson recently criticized a prospective bipartisan Senate border deal, which Schumer said could receive a Senate vote next week. He argued that the solution to the ongoing wave of migrant crossings is the GOP's border and immigration, [*H.R. 2*](https://www.newsweek.com/house-gop-passes-border-bill-senate-argues-title-42-extension-1799821?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), a measure that would restrict immigration and fund border security efforts, which passed the House without a single Democratic vote. On Wednesday, he showed some signs of softening his firm position.

"I told the president what I have been saying for many months and that is that we must have change at the border, substantive policy change," Johnson said in an address following the meeting. "We're not insistent on a particular name of a piece of legislation, but we are insistent that the elements have to be meaningful."

Johnson's comments come during a tenuous time amid his newfound leadership where some conservative [*members of his party voiced the threat*](https://www.newsweek.com/republicans-talk-ousting-speaker-johnson-amid-spending-deal-fervor-1859302?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)of removing him from the speakership due to disputes over funding levels.

Representative [*Marjorie Taylor Greene*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/marjorie-taylor-greene?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), a Georgia Republican, escalated the situation, after [*telling an Axios reporter*](https://x.com/andrewsolender/status/1747694818996662547?s=46&t=KPTRGNaqp3VKjf0OumyYNw) she would introduce a motion to vacate — the procedure used to oust former Speaker [*Kevin McCarthy*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kevin-mccarthy?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) — if Johnson supports a Ukraine aid package.

With such threats looming, Johnson has displayed some hesitancy on taking firm public positions.

[*Punchbowl New*](https://punchbowl.news/article/johnson-mcconnell-border-ukraine/) [*s*](https://punchbowl.news/article/johnson-mcconnell-border-ukraine/), a Congress-focused digital news outlet, reported earlier this week that Johnson told [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) during a Sunday call that he believes the border would be best handled under a future Trump presidency, casting doubt whether he'd bring a Senate deal to vote.

Senate Republican whip John Thune, a potential McConnell successor, pushed back on that idea, telling reporters "there's absolutely no way that we would get the kind of border policy that's being talked about right now" because [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) would not agree to such enforcement provisions under Trump. If Johnson were to reject such a deal and avoid a Ukraine vote, some believe he could be defying the wishes of the majority of his party.

"If you strip the Ukraine portion out of the larger bill and just put Ukraine on the floor as a standalone vote in the House, it gets over 300 votes," Democratic Congressman Adam Smith of Washington told *Newsweek*. "It's just a matter of being willing to stand up to the MAGA Republicans who don't support Ukraine."

Smith has unique insight on the issue given that he serves as the top Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, which is known for its unique level of bipartisanship due to its role overseeing national security matters. Smith's Republican counterpart Congressman Mike Rogers of Alabama has notably [*spoken in favor*](https://armedservices.house.gov/news/press-releases/rogers-opening-statement-hearing-oversight-us-military-support-ukraine) Ukraine.

With [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) divided among 220 Republicans and 213 Democrats, it would take less than half of the Republican Conference to support Ukraine to exceed the 300-vote total Smith predicted, given that all Democrats appear united on the issue. A vote in September 2023 on aid for Ukraine also showed that most Republican House members still supported continued funding.

Ultimately though, Johnson's decision will be one influenced by ***politics***, ***politics*** around whether his party can afford to reject a bipartisan border deal and whether his party's base align more closely with McConnell and the GOP senators who support Ukraine or Marjorie Taylor Greene and the conservative lawmakers, most of whom serve in the House, who oppose the effort.

Republican Senator Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming has served in both chambers of Congress. When it comes to which body she believes better represents the desires of GOP voters, who will ultimately guide the party's longer-term national security decisions, she gives the edge to House.

"Most [House] members, because they're up for reelection every two years, I think have a very close connection to their constituents," Lummis told *Newsweek*. "So, they're more current, I think, than senators."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2337257/big-four-leaders-congress.jpg)

**Graphic**

The Big Four Leaders of Congress

Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and Speaker of the House Mike Johnson appear together at the U.S. Capitol Building on December 12, 2023, in Washington, D.C. President Joe Biden met with the four leaders today to discuss U.S. national security priorities.

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