

# [***Republican Disregard for Border Negotiator James Lankford Angers Democrats***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B8N-F5T1-DY68-117P-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** "I know James to be someone who is truthful, hardworking, transparent, and wants to solve the problem," Democratic Senator Chris Coons told Newsweek.

**Body**

Democrats are crossing the aisle to show support for Republican Senator [*James Lankford*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/james-lankford?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Oklahoma, one of the architects behind a bipartisan border deal that has faced the scorn of former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and other conservatives.

Lankford, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, serves as the top Republican on both the [*Senate's*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Select Committee on Ethics and the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management. He was chosen by Senate Minority Leader [*Mitch McConnell*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mitch-mcconnell?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to help craft a bipartisan solution to the historic illegal migrant crossing numbers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Oklahoman delivered, unveiling a bill crafted with independent Senator [*Kyrsten Sinema*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kyrsten-sinema?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Arizona and Democratic Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut that received the support of McConnell, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *The Wall Street Journal* Editorial Board and the Border Patrol's union, the National Border Patrol Council.

However, hours after the [*370-page deal*](https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/emergency_national_security_supplemental_bill_text.pdf) was released, Trump called the bill "horrendous" and House Speaker [*Mike Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) said it'd be "dead on arrival" if it reached the House. The former president later appeared on a conservative radio show where [*he said*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/05/politics/fact-check-trump-james-lankford-endorsement/index.html) the border deal is a "very bad bill for [Lankford's] career" and denied ever endorsing the Oklahoman even though he did so in [*2022*](https://okcfox.com/news/local/election-2022-senator-james-lankford-oklahoma-president-donald-trump-midterm-endorsement-madison-horn-republican-democrat-united-states-senate). On Tuesday, McConnell said the deal "will not become law."

Democratic Senator Chris Coons of Delaware told *Newsweek*, "I know James to be someone who is truthful, hardworking, transparent, and wants to solve the problem. I personally am feeling heavy hearted today for all the time and effort Senator Murphy and Senator Sinema and Senator Lankford and their staff put in over months to get to the result that was presented."

Coons serves alongside Lankford as the top Democrat on the ethics committee. He's traveled alongside the Oklahoman to Mexico City as well as the southwest border and has seen Lankford's work on the border firsthand. Coons knows how hard it can be to reach a border agreement, having worked on efforts in 2013 and 2018.

The Delaware senator described Lankford as being "among the most conservative people I've ever been friends."

"I had Republican colleagues say, 'we will not sign off on a border deal unless James approves of it, and if he approves of it, we trust him—that's enough," Coons added. "I'm really struggling with the idea that Trump calls up and, on a dime, the overwhelming majority of that caucus is now saying they won't do it."

Lankford told reporters Monday that he's not focusing on ***politics*** surrounding the issue and instead remains focused on finding a fix to the issues facing America's border.

His bill would attempt to do so through transforming the asylum system by raising the standard of proof and putting in place an emergency authority that would prevent illegal crossers from making asylum claims when the border faces a seven-day average of 5,000 illegal daily crossings. However, the president could trigger that authority when the average reaches 4,000 crossings.

Critically, the bill would also expedite the asylum claim review process by allowing officers to vet certain claims, a change that the bill's authors say would help alleviate U.S. immigration courts, which confront a case backlog of 3 million.

Under the current system, individuals who cross illegally can surrender to border patrol, make an asylum claim, then wait in the U.S. while that claim is being processed. Because of the backlog, processing can take years.

Additionally, the bill would invest $20 billion in hiring more border patrol agents and asylum officers, as well as upgrading technology while adding thousands of additional family- and employment-based visas.

Coons was not the only Democrat to express sympathy for Lankford. Speaking to reporters Tuesday, Murphy said, "it is disgusting what they did to James. They put him out there and asked him on their behalf to negotiate a compromise and then they didn't even give him the chance to argue the merits."

Senate Majority Leader [*Chuck Schumer*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/chuck-schumer?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) congratulated Lankford and the other two negotiators for their efforts and accused [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Tuesday for turning away from the deal to offer Trump a problem to orient his 2024 campaign around.

While Lankford faces ongoing scrutiny from members of the conservative media and [*some lawmakers*](https://x.com/RandPaul/status/1754554775922700717?s=20) on Capitol Hill, McConnell congratulated him for a "remarkable job" during his Tuesday press conference and other members of Senate GOP leadership followed suit.

Fellow Oklahoma Senator Markwayne Mullin, a Republican, also came to Lankford's defense, [*telling Politico*](https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2024/02/05/congress/deal-nears-collapse-00139779), "There's been people saying that [Lankford] is immoral. If that guy's immoral, I'm literally swimming in flames."

*Newsweek* contacted the Trump campaign and Lankford's office for further comment via email on Tuesday.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2345541/democrats-support-james-lankford.jpg)

**Graphic**

Democrats Support James Lankford

Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Republican Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma has spent months working to address the problems facing America's southwest border. Here, Lankford is seen on Capitol Hill on May 03, 2022 in Washington, D.C.

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