

# [***MAGA Can't Sink Border Deal, Says Republican Negotiator***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B61-DX01-DY68-13T5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Alex J. Rouhandeh

**Highlight:** "We've not had a pause on this at all," Senator James Lankford said amid rumors that Leader Mitch McConnell may hedge his support.

**Body**

The lead Republican negotiator on a bipartisan deal to secure the border told reporters Thursday that negotiations are still on despite reported concerns from [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) GOP leadership that moving forward on an agreement could undermine former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Trump has made border security a top issue of his campaign and called on [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to reject a deal "unless we get EVERYTHING," leading some of his supporters in [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) to come out against a potential bipartisan deal.

On Wednesday, [*Punchbowl News reported*](https://punchbowl.news/article/mcconnell-threads-trump-needle-border/) that Senate Republican Leader [*Mitch McConnell*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mitch-mcconnell?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) told conference members in a closed-door meeting that "***politics*** on this have changed" and "we don't want to do anything to undermine [Trump]."

Speculation ensued that a deal may fail, but lead GOP negotiator Senator [*James Lankford*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/james-lankford?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Oklahoma shot down that notion.

"It's not stopped," Lankford of Oklahoma said. "We're still going forward. We've not had a pause on this at all."

Lankford said McConnell's comments were meant to acknowledge the "elephant in the room" that 2024 is an election year and dynamics have changed since negotiations began in October.

The Oklahoman said McConnell was making the point to Senate Republicans that "we need to do both here": respond to the "crisis" at the border by implementing legislation while also acknowledging the "reality" that the border is a top campaign issue.

*Newsweek* contacted McConnell's office for comment.

Despite Lankford's commitment to a deal, other Republicans viewed McConnell's comments as acknowledgment of a failing negotiation strategy that has centered around tying border enforcement to Ukraine funding which many Republicans oppose but McConnell favors.

"All I can assume is it's Leader McConnell trying to shift blame for his failed negotiation," Republican Senator [*Ron Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ron-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Wisconsin told *Newsweek*.

Great uncertainty surrounds the content of a potential bipartisan border deal because legislative text has yet to be released. According to Politico, limited sections of the unfinalized texts have been sent to Appropriations Committee members, who'd deal with funding a potential deal.

Republican Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who supports a border deal and has been working on the issue closely over the past year, told reporters that, regarding McConnell's comments, "Maybe some people read between the lines, wishful thinking."

He said he left yesterday's meeting under no impression that McConnell had changed his stance. Rather, Tillis said the leader was emphasizing that, as president, Trump had lamented the limited statutory authority he had to handle border issues.

Tillis and [*other Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/josh-hawley-disagrees-gop-leaders-who-say-border-deal-helps-trump-1863013?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) who support a deal believe [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) would only be willing to make the concessions currently being discussed under a Democratic presidential administration. If Trump were to win in 2024, they believe a bipartisan deal would afford him greater power and ability to address border crossings.

"What we were talking about is things have changed in terms of the president's posture because of ***politics***," Tillis said. "Not that things have changed because we've gotten into this negotiation and somehow we're changing strategy."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2340819/mcconnell-stands-lankford-deal.jpg)

**Graphic**

McConnell Stands By Lankford Deal

Photo by Joshua Roberts/Getty Images

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma appear at the Capitol on June 17, 2021 in Washington, D.C. The two Republicans have been steadfast in their support for a deal that bolsters enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border.

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