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## Democrats fume over weak early response to Trump

BY AMIE PARNES AND ALEXANDER BOLTON - 02/03/25 6:00 AM ET



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Democrats are fuming about their party leadership's early response to President Trump.

Strategists say the reaction to Trump is inconsistent and not aggressive enough to combat Trump, who has taken a series of actions to remake the government.

In a whirlwind first two weeks in office, Trump has issued a string of executive orders, removed agency watchdogs and eliminated government diversity programs.

And while Democrats have begun to punch back, strategists say it's not nearly enough, especially as a number of Democrats in the Senate join Republicans in confirming Trump's Cabinet officials.

"Democratic leadership acts like it's permanently 2006, a year when, yes, we took back the Senate, but also before the Republican Party found a cult leader and lost its collective minds," Democratic strategist Christy Setzer said. "We don't live in that world anymore; we have a lifelong conman and convicted felon in the Oval Office who tries every day to turn this country into a dictatorship. Let's start acting like it.

"That means you can't be mad about Trump trying to freeze government spending in the morning, and vote for his Treasury secretary — who will destroy the economy — in the afternoon," Setzer added. "Stop helping Trump."

Frustrations mounted during a tense call last week between Democratic governors and Senate Democratic Leader [Chuck Schumer](#) (N.Y.). Six Democratic governors, including Illinois Gov. [JB Pritzker](#) and Massachusetts Gov. [Maura Healey](#), pressed Schumer to put up more of a fight against Trump's agenda.

Healey specifically urged Schumer to slow down Senate votes and do more to stir up public opposition, according to The New York Times, which first reported the call.

That produced an exasperated response from Senate Democrats, who spoke on the floor late into the night Wednesday to highlight the impact the funding freeze ordered by Trump's budget office would have on communities around the country.

"I would say to my friend [Pritzker], as you would like to have a majority of governors, we would like to have the majority of senators. There's a limit to how much we can we do," Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (Ill.) said.

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Senate Democrats are divided over how hard they should fight to resist Trump's agenda, with Democrats up for reelection in battleground states looking for areas of compromise.

Seven Democrats voted last week to confirm [Kristi Noem](#) as secretary of Homeland Security, where she will have oversight of Trump's border security and immigration policies, including plans to deport hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

Sen. [Chris Murphy](#) (D-Conn.) is calling for Democrats to put up more resistance against Trump's nominees. He slowed the confirmation process down last month by putting a hold on John Ratcliffe, Trump's pick to head the CIA.

"I'm not voting for a single nominee while this crisis over federal spending persists, and I don't think we should proceed to any legislation until Republicans stand up and start helping us protect democracy," Murphy said last week, referring to Trump's executive orders freezing broad swaths of federal funding.

Murphy argued that voters around the country won't fully accept the alarms Democrats have raised about Trump's agenda until they see Democratic senators and House members deploying every tactic they can to fight it in Washington.

Murphy noted that Doug Burgum, Trump's pick to lead the Interior Department, will oversee the effort to expand oil and gas drilling on federal lands. He just got "a whole bunch of Democratic votes," the senator said.

Twenty-five Democrats and Sen. [Angus King](#) (I-Maine), who caucuses with Democrats, voted to confirm Burgum on Thursday.

"We are wondering why people out there are not rising up in the way that they did in 2017, even though Trump's conduct is worse," Murphy said. "I think they watch us supporting his policies and his nominees and come to the conclusion it must not be that bad."

At the same time, Senate progressives were deeply frustrated with centrists who voted last month with Republicans to pass the Laken Riley Act, which mandates the federal detention of migrants accused of theft, burglary or assaulting law enforcement.

Democratic critics warned their colleagues it would worsen the problem of "mass incarceration" and likely sweep up children in mass detentions.

Some Democratic senators said they were frustrated Schumer didn't keep members of his caucus in line before they voted to take up that bill on the Senate floor, putting it on a fast track to passing and getting signed into law as one of Trump's first major accomplishments.

One Democratic senator acknowledged Democrats were caught flat-footed.

"Look we have a bunch of freshmen who had already voted for Laken Riley in the House and were unwilling" to change their position on the bill, said the lawmaker, who described it as a "terribly written" law with "significant unintended consequences."

"I don't think we had a cohesive caucus response to that," the senator added.

After the governors' call with Schumer on Wednesday, another Democratic senator bristled at the incoming criticism from those within their party.

"A lot of folks aren't that familiar with the rules, and they haven't caught up to where we are. We cannot block a single nominee unless we get [four Republicans to vote no]," the

Whitehouse — and persuading them not to has been an important caucus win,” the lawmaker added, referring to Sens. John Fetterman (D-Pa.) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), going on to note that the Democrats “came close to defeating” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

“What more do they want us to do? Handcuff ourselves to lampposts and get arrested?” the senator asked incredulously.

Democratic strategist Rodell Mollineau, who served as a senior aide to the late Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), said he is sympathetic to the frustration but noted that Democrats had a good week and found an opening to fire back at Republicans over federal funding.

“Democrats found an opening this week and exploited it,” Mollineau said, adding that Democrats “have to be ready for these kinds of moments.”

“There will be many pitches to swing at. We don’t need to swing at every one,” he said.

But Mollineau cautioned that Democrats “can’t fight with the old playbook.”

“They need to find new ways to find the audiences they need to reach and counter the administration’s moves,” he said. “We need to be smart about where we fight and when we fight and how we fight to maximize our leverage.”

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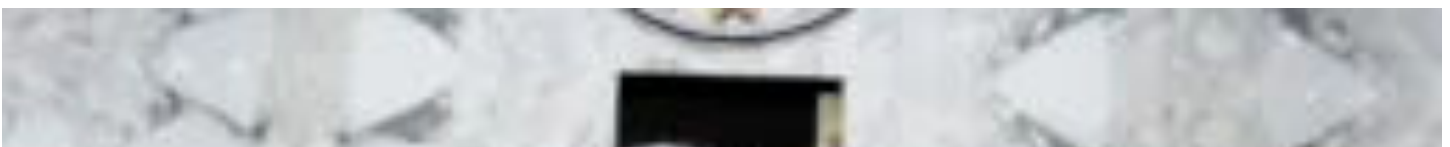
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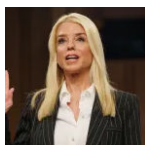
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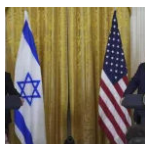
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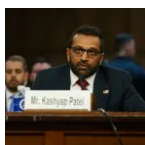
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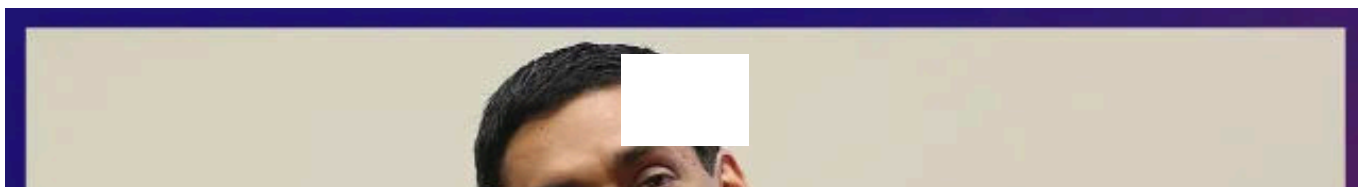


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