



EARLY AND
OFTEN

FEB. 3,
2025

Democrats May Shut Down Government to Keep Trump From Gutting It



By Ed Kilgore, political columnist for *Intelligencer* since 2015



Democrats like Patty Murray are mulling a more radical posture on a potential government shutdown. Photo: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

You can put the whole Trump 2.0 “shock and awe” agenda of right-wing policies into two baskets. There are things that Donald Trump pretty clearly has the power to do (e.g., tariffs and revoking policies set by Biden

executive orders) or a Republican-controlled Congress can do via the upcoming budget reconciliation bill (or bills) that Democrats cannot stop. And then there are things Trump and his underlings are doing that rely on exotic and dangerous theories of imperial presidential powers that Richard Nixon could have only dreamed of possessing. These include the Office of Management and Budget's aborted "federal funding freeze" and the guerrilla campaign that Elon Musk and his Geek Kiddie Corps is undertaking by physically seizing control of "choke points" for government operations. Democrats obviously can't do anything about those executive actions, other than to point and shout and encourage the courts to intervene.

But there is a steadily increasing possibility that the Trump offensive could go so far and so fast that congressional Democrats are tempted essentially to go on strike when it comes to actions where they do actually have some leverage. These include an upcoming effort to keep the federal government operating when the stopgap spending authority enacted in December runs out on March 14. And Democrats will also probably have to lend some support to the debt-limit increase Trump has demanded, which will need to happen by late spring (Republicans could include that in their party-line budget reconciliation legislation, but extreme hostility from House Freedom Caucus types makes that improbable).

Would the "party of government" really defend that government by threatening to defund it or even risk a debt default? There's already talk about extreme measures, as Senator Patty Murray told Punchbowl News:

Democrats are, as always, committed to responsibly funding the government, but it is extremely difficult to reach an agreement on topline — much less full-year spending bills — when the president is illegally blocking vast chunks of approved funding, when he is trying to unilaterally shutter critical agencies, and when an unelected billionaire is empowered to force his way into our government's central, highly-sensitive payments system [at the Treasury Department]. Democrats and Republicans alike must be able to trust that when a deal gets signed into law, it will be followed.

A Democratic staffer put it more starkly in the same story: "We could get to a tipping point where bipartisan cooperation becomes an overwhelming negative for us."

So the emerging idea may be for congressional Democrats to insist that before they provide a single vote that Republicans need, Elon Musk and Russell Vought (the OMB director nominee widely thought to be behind the funding freeze) must be put on a leash. It's possible that by doing so, they could be empowering people within the administration who are either terrified or threatened by the vast power grabs represented by both Musk's shadowy DOGE operation and Vought's ambitions to make OMB the all-powerful "central nervous system" of the entire federal budget. They are potentially even aligning themselves with MAGA "populists" for whom extreme austerity measures are an annoying hangover from pre-Trump conservatism. And presumably congressional Republicans, despite their silence about or complicity in the Musk-Vought shenanigans, have some misgivings about being made completely superfluous in terms of spending decisions and policy priorities.

A Democratic hard line on any appropriations deal could put Republicans generally in a bind, if only because fiscal hard-liners in the House are already ratcheting up their demands for deep budget cuts to secure their own votes, as Politico reports:

House Republican leaders want committees to land deeper spending cuts in their party-line bill to enact President Donald Trump's domestic agenda, as they scramble to address a rebellion from key Budget Committee members who think Speaker Mike Johnson's initial plan falls short.

Key hard-liners and others on the Budget panel are pushing to outline at least \$1 trillion in spending cuts in the blueprint that the committee is supposed to debate this week, according to three people familiar with the private discussions who were granted anonymity to describe them.

At a minimum, congressional Democrats need to make it immediately clear that they will use their leverage, even if that means a government shutdown. But at some point, they need to decide if they will use that leverage to secure concessions on the details of spending levels, or instead go big with an attack on lawless expansions of executive powers. Some Democrats may be inclined to let the courts police the kind of wild conduct associated with DOGE and to gamble that the U.S. Supreme Court will put a stop to Vought’s ambitions for unlimited presidential power to “impound” congressionally appropriated dollars as some sort of personal embodiment of the popular or divine will. But if the chaotic events of the last week are just an appetizer for outrages to come, Democrats may conclude that functioning as an opposition party requires putting themselves in the path of the Trump 2.0 locomotive and yelling, “STOP!”

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2:58 P.M. POLITICS

Republicans Fall Behind Nominating Tulsi Gabbard

By NIA PRATER

er squeaking by in a key vote, Gabbard is seemingly on a glide path to confirmation.

3 P.M. CONSPIRACY

When Will the Declassified JFK Files Be Released Publicly?

By MATT STIEB

e president has ordered their disclosure with a timeline that suggests it might actually happen this time.

3 P.M. TREMENDOUS CONTENT

Trump to Attend Super Bowl Because We Can’t Have a Moment’s Peace

By MARGARET HARTMANN

inking you’ll try to avoid talking politics at your Super Bowl watch party next Sunday? Think again!

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12:25 P.M. POLITICS

Key Republican Falls in Line Behind RFK Jr.

By NIA PRATER

Kennedy's HHS nomination advanced to the full Senate after Republican senator Bill Cassidy, a potential swing vote, voted in favor.

1 A.M. EARLY AND OFTEN

Trump Cabinet Confirmation Hearings: Schedule & How to Watch

By MARGARET HARTMANN AND CHAS DANNER

Will the Senate GOP confirm controversial picks like Tulsi Gabbard and RFK Jr.? Here's the hearings schedule and list of who's been confirmed.

1 A.M. RAIDS

ICE Has Restaurant Workers Terrified

By CHRIS CROWLEY

body is sure exactly what's going on, but any threat of deportation is too grave to ignore.

1 A.M. SCREEN TIME

The Trade War Comes For Temu

By JOHN HERRMAN

mericans flocked to Temu and Shein. Trump's tariffs could destroy them.

2025 POLITICS

Canada Tariffs Delayed Too: Trade War Updates

By CHAS DANNER

ly the new China tariff is still set to start Tuesday, at least for now.

2025 EARLY AND OFTEN

Elon Musk May Have Your Social Security Number

By CHAS DANNER

The billionaire and his DOGE agents were granted full access to the Treasury's federal payments system, and nobody knows what end.

2025 FOREIGN INTERESTS

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oteurs, tears, and a last-minute push to save lives.

2025 DEMOCRATS

Relitigating 2024 Won't Help Democrats Fight Trump Today

By ED KILGORE

Democrats need to avoid making last year's mistakes in 2028. But none of it may matter if they don't unite to fight Trump right now.

2025 TREMENDOUS CONTENT

Why Does Trump Want Greenland? His Imperialistic Threats, Explained.

By MARGARET HARTMANN

Some of Trump's threats to take over Greenland, Canada, and the Panama Canal are based on actual U.S. strategic goals. Others are just idiotic.

2025 CONFIRMATION BIAS

How Democrats Lost the Dissident Vote

By ROSS BARKAN

Even if RFK Jr. and Tulsi Gabbard are not confirmed, they represent a problem for their old party.

2025 JUST ASKING QUESTIONS

'We've Got an Enormous Crisis on Our Hands'

By BENJAMIN HART

Public-policy expert Don Kettl discusses Trump and Musk's blitzkrieg attack on the federal workforce and where it goes next.

2025 SUPER BOWL

The Kansas City Chiefs Are Something Worse Than Cheaters

By JAKE NEVINS

America has had enough of this boring and swagless dynasty.

2025 UNNATURAL DISASTERS

How Can a Plane Suddenly Nose-Dive?

By JEFF WISE

Here are some of the reasons why aircraft can catastrophically veer toward the ground like a medevac jet did in Philadelphia on Friday night.

2025 POLL POSITION

Trump Approval Rating Looks Fragile at Start of Second Term

By ED KILGORE

The 47th president is more popular than he's been for most of his political career. But it won't take much to bring back bad memories.

1/2025 EARLY AND OFTEN

Democrats See Opportunity in Unpopular Trump Spending Cuts

By ED KILGORE

Focusing on the concrete consequences of Donald Trump's funding freezes, rather than abstract arguments about democracy, could be the way forward.

1/2025 UNNATURAL DISASTERS

The D.C. Plane Crash Is No Mystery

By JEFF WISE

What is unknown, but one basic fact is not: The helicopter pilot was clearly at fault.

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Trump's 'Shock and Awe' Looks More Like Chaos and Confusion

By ED KILGORE

From the funding freeze to the federal-employee buyout, the White House doesn't seem to know what its own teams are doing.

1/2025 THE LAW

How Trump Has Already Changed the Justice Department

By ELIE HONIG

immediately went into demolition mode.

1/2025 THE CITY POLITIC

Does New York City Even Have a Mayor Anymore?

By ERROL LOUIS

c Adams has receded from view. Others are starting to fill the power vacuum.

1/2025 EARLY AND OFTEN

Trump’s DEI Witch Hunt Reaches a New Low

By ED KILGORE

Verbally blaming Obama, Biden, and diversity programs for a plane crash wasn’t enough: Trump repeated his baseless allegations in an executive order.

1/2025 AVIATION

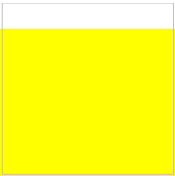
DCA Tower Staffing ‘Not Normal’ Prior to Plane Crash: Report

By NIA PRATER

A preliminary FAA report says that staffing at the D.C. airport’s air-traffic control tower was “not normal for the time of /.”

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