

# Washington Weekly

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## This Week in Congress and Washington

### Reconciliation

Last week, the House passed its own budget resolution along party lines, with Congressman Thomas Massie (R-KY) as the sole Republican "no" vote. To secure the legislation's passage, House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) made several key assurances, including the permanent extension of President Trump's 2017 tax cuts, spending cuts if the tax provisions are expanded, and the continuation of safety-net programs. Speaker Johnson also stated that he is increasingly aligned with a Senate push to adopt a "current policy" baseline instead of a "current law" baseline, a shift requiring the Senate Parliamentarian's support in the Senate. This change allows the 2017 tax cut extensions to be incorporated into the baseline without incurring the estimated cost of the "current law" baseline. However, the House-passed resolution currently reflects the "current law" baseline. Even if Republicans adopt "current policy" baseline, they will still need to find offsets for additional tax cuts, though this approach gives them greater flexibility.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Progressive Caucus and New Democrats, with backing from House Democratic leadership, sent a letter urging Speaker Johnson to abandon any proposed cuts to Medicaid, Social Security, and Medicare. Notably, the House Freedom Caucus and fiscal hawks have yet to align with the Senate-backed plan.

### Appropriations

House and Senate Republican leadership have developed a tentative plan to fund the government beyond the expiration of the current continuing resolution (CR) on March 14, 2025. Leadership's strategy is to move a "clean" CR for the remainder of the fiscal year. Speaker Johnson must

find a way to secure votes from Freedom Caucus members, who traditionally resist voting for CRs or other appropriations vehicles. If the House majority fails to align behind the CR, the government is increasingly expected to shut down. House and Senate Democrats are pushing for language in any funding bill that mandates President Trump spend money exactly as Congress appropriates it. It is uncertain whether Leadership's bill will gain support from Democrats. President Trump expressed his support for the plan on Truth Social last Thursday.

The CR is expected to be "clean," carrying only the anomalies deemed necessary by the Office of Management and Budget to execute funding under the administration's direction for the remainder of FY25. There was discussion about including a debt limit suspension extension, but that was rejected as too difficult to pass. It is also unclear if the potential CR will include disaster aid for California.

Should the notional CR plan move forward, House Appropriations Committee Chair Tom Cole (R-OK) has indicated his intent to seek House Republican leadership's support for his committee to continue working toward the completion of FY25 appropriations bills. This would reflect changing circumstances and adopt a topline spending level slightly higher than the CR's funding levels, even though government funding through the end of the fiscal year will be provided under the CR.

## Insider Poll: The Democratic Party Has 'Lost its Way'

[Holly Otterbein](#), [Lisa Kashinsky](#), [Braktkton Booker](#) and [Myah Ward](#), *Politico*

Voters still have a sour view of Democrats six weeks after President Donald Trump and Republicans swept into Washington with control of all branches of the federal government, according to a new poll.

A plurality of voters — 40 percent — said the Democratic Party doesn't have any strategy whatsoever for responding to Trump, according to the survey by the liberal firm Blueprint that was shared first with POLITICO. Another 24 percent said Democrats have a game plan, but it's a bad one.

A paltry 10 percent said that the party has a solid technique for dealing with Trump. And that's coming from a Democratic outfit's survey.

The unsparing findings, issued by a group backed by mega-donor Reid Hoffman, amount to a major rebuke of the party's approach to the dawn of Trump's second term. And they come at a moment when Democrats are already feeling despondent after their roundly mocked response to Trump's address to Congress on Tuesday, which was lambasted as unproductive and amateurish.

"Voters correctly identified that the Democratic Party has lost its way," said Evan Roth Smith, the top pollster for Blueprint. "The Democratic response [Tuesday] night was more or less a continuation of what we've seen from Democrats so far. Which is, there was nothing overtly wrong about it, but it didn't actually do anything to ameliorate this core issue Democrats face, which is voters aren't quite sure what we stand for and would like us to get back to the basic principles of the party."

On Capitol Hill, top Democrats put on a brave face Wednesday in the wake of their widely criticized reaction to Trump's speech. But across the party, the damage was still reverberating, as elected officials

and strategists scrambled to clean up their response. It was an effort mired in finger-pointing and with little agreement over how Democrats should oppose Trump.

The strategy for countering the president's speech — or lack thereof — laid bare how divided Democrats still are on how to counter Trump's steamrolling of Washington, and how ineffective their efforts to blunt him remain.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries [had cautioned Democrats to take a measured approach](#) to Trump's speech at the Capitol. Instead, Democrats walked out of the chamber, interrupted the president and held up signs in protest that read "False" and "This is not normal." There was no blunt-force attempt by Democrats to reestablish themselves as the party of the working class.

Instead, Symone Sanders, an ex-top aide to former Vice President Kamala Harris, said on the [social media platform X](#) that the signs were "not landing." Progressives complained that Sen. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.), who delivered the official Democratic response to Trump, positively invoked former Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. [Others on the left](#) disagreed, arguing that Slotkin's speech represented the respectful, down-to-earth approach they think Democrats should take. To critics, the night embodied many of the party's tendencies that have turned off voters: that it is performative, too often takes the bait from Republicans and is failing to express a coherent message focused on Americans' economic well-being.

Sen. John Fetterman (D-Pa.), who has been one of the most vocal critics of his party's approach to Trump, said in an interview that the spectacle from Democrats was "sad AF." Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) said that while he understands "the emotion behind" such outbursts, they are "not my style."

In an illustration of how sharply Democrats are split over how to take on Trump, one of the party's rising stars, Rep. Maxwell Frost (D-Florida), said his colleagues' rowdiness on Tuesday was the point. He was among [a group of Democrats](#) who departed before the end of Trump's speech.

"It is rude. It is disrespectful," he said. "That was the whole point of it — to disrespect him."

Frost said it was old-fashioned to adhere to norms of decorum given the president's own behavior, pointing to the fact that Trump taunted Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) as "Pocahontas" during his speech.

David Axelrod, the past top strategist for former President Barack Obama, said Democrats in blue districts are likely facing enormous pressure from constituents to take a stand against Trump. He compared Rep. Al Green (D-Texas) disrupting Trump to Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) calling then-President Joe Biden a "liar" during his State of the Union address in 2023. Green was tossed out of the chamber after he disrupted Trump, yelling "you have no mandate" and shaking his cane.

"I'm sure Rep. Green got plenty of attaboys from the base for his protest. But with many other Americans — and not just Republicans — it was no more appealing than Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert heckling Biden," Axelrod said. "It's just not particularly helpful."

And it did win accolades from some within the party. Michael Hardaway, a former aide to Jeffries, said on X that Green was "[an American hero](#)" for standing up to Trump. He added in a text message to POLITICO that he applauded Green's push to [draft articles of impeachment](#) against Trump.

Green now faces the possibility of censure after Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) on Wednesday introduced a measure to formally punish him for his outburst.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday afternoon, Green stood by his approach.

“When you are engaged in peaceful protest, you get in the way,” he said. “You sometimes create a disturbance, but you have to be willing to suffer the consequences. And I’m willing to suffer the consequences for my actions.”

Meanwhile, some Democrats insisted there was no disagreement within the party over how to attack Trump, despite evidence to the contrary.

Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-Conn.) said House Democrats were in lockstep over opposing Speaker Mike Johnson’s push to pass a six-month funding extension to keep the government open beyond March 14, in an effort to slow down Trump and Elon Musk’s dismantling of the federal government.

“It’s actually remarkable when people say Democrats are not unified,” she said. “I haven’t heard a single Democrat stray away from that message.”

Roth Smith, the Blueprint pollster, said Democrats’ message on Tuesday was “a little highfalutin,” pointing to Slotkin’s nods to Reagan and bipartisanship, when what the party needs is “a reset.”

As much as Democrats are unsure of what to do in the second Trump era, he said voters see a straightforward path: Get back to their roots as a party that defends Social Security and Medicare, workers’ rights and a good economy for all Americans.

As simple as that sounds, it has so far proven elusive for Democrats.

# GOP Senators Tell Musk DOGE Actions Will Require Their Votes

Alexander Bolton, *The Hill*

Republican senators told tech billionaire Elon Musk at a closed-door meeting Wednesday that his aggressive moves to shrink the federal government will need a vote on Capitol Hill, sending a clear message that he needs to respect Congress's power of the purse.

Musk met with Republican senators at a luncheon to give them an overview of his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) team's work to root out waste, fraud and abuse across an array of federal programs.

Sen. [Rand Paul](#) (R-Ky.), who largely supports Musk's mission, told him DOGE's efforts to cut spending and reduce the federal workforce reductions won't pass muster with the courts unless Congress codifies them by passing a spending rescission package.

"To make it real, to make it go beyond the moment of the day, it needs to come back in the form of a rescission package," Paul said after the meeting, pointing to 5-4 decision by the Supreme Court on Wednesday morning rejecting the Trump administration's argument that billions of dollars in foreign aid should remain frozen.

"I love all the stuff they're doing, but we got to vote on it. My message to Elon was: Let's get over the impoundment idea and let's send it back as a rescission package," he said.

"Then, what we have to do is get to 51 senators or 50 senators" to vote "to cut the spending," he added. "We talked a lot about, how do we make these things permanent? Rescission was a big part of the discussion."

Paul and other Republican senators said Musk appeared open to the idea but didn't seem to expect DOGE's cuts and workforce reductions would need to come back to Congress for ultimate approval.

Senate Budget Committee Chair Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said there's broad desire within the Senate GOP conference for a vote on DOGE's recommended cuts.

"Yes, yes, 100 percent, and we should be doing it, like, yesterday," Graham said.

"You could do regulatory reform without us, but anything that doesn't fit within [budget] reconciliation has to be done through rescissions," he explained.

Graham and other Republican lawmakers said Musk's proposed cuts cannot be codified through the special budget reconciliation package they plan to move to address border security, energy reform and tax reform.

"My understanding is, since the budget reconciliation deals with mandatory spending [and] that the DOGE cuts would be primarily from discretionary, the way we'd do that procedurally is for the White House to request us to take up a rescissions package," Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) said. "We could pass it with 51 votes here and a majority in the House."

GOP lawmakers say Musk's failure to brief them in advance about impending cuts and funding freezes — or to respond to their questions and concerns about actions taken by DOGE — reflected his belief

that he thought the administration could largely bypass them by simply impounding funds lawfully appropriated by Congress.

Musk, for example, revealed Wednesday he wasn't aware that Congress could pass a rescissions package through the Senate with a simple majority vote, rather than the 60-vote threshold usually needed to pass controversial bills through the upper chamber.

At least one Republican senator at Wednesday's meeting said there needed to be better communication with Musk and his team and wanted to know what else DOGE is planning.

Many Republican senators have complained publicly and privately about being blindsided by Musk's proposed funding freezes and reductions in workforce.

"Every day's another surprise," Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said last week of the frequent news bombshells from DOGE.

Collins said a methodical approach to reforming government would be better than what she called Musk's "sledgehammer approach."

Senate Steering Committee Chair Rick Scott (R-Fla.) invited Musk to the lunch meeting to speak to GOP senators directly after several of them voiced their complaints about what they thought was a lack of transparency and accountability at DOGE.

Several GOP senators vented their frustrations over Musk's operating style — especially his team's failure to respond promptly to their concerns — at a meeting last week with White House chief of staff Susie Wiles.

Wiles told frustrated senators they should contact her directly with their concerns over funding freezes and reductions in force pushed by Musk and his team of young engineers.

Sources familiar with Wednesday's meeting said the GOP senators who complained about Musk and his methods last week were much more cordial when they met with him face-to-face in the wood-paneled Mansfield Room just off the Senate floor.

"Senators were much nicer to him in person than they have been. A week ago, people were pretty cranky: 'They're shutting down stuff, we're not being told.' They were much more polite to him in person," a person familiar with Wednesday's lunch said.

With Musk in the room, GOP senators phrased their concerns about DOGE's spending cuts and freezes much more diplomatically.

"The way people phrased it was, 'When DOGE is being blamed for something, how can we verify whether it's true or not?' It's a nice way of saying, 'If I want to complain, how can I do it?'" the source said.

GOP lawmakers were vexed last week by a surprise announcement that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had decided to dismiss 1,400 probationary employees. That came on the heels of the dismissal of 1,000 VA employees on Feb. 13.

Faced with pushback from Congress, the department later announced it had mistakenly rescinded job offers to staff the Veterans Crisis Line, explaining that was due to "an administrative error."

Musk told the senators he would set up a process to respond quickly to their concerns and questions, something that appeared to please the Republicans sitting around the room.

While a number of GOP senators have complaints about Musk's aggressive tactics and lack of collaboration with Congress, they are leery of confronting him directly, fearful he could pour tens of millions of dollars into backing Republican primary challengers next year.

Musk spent at least \$288 million to help elect President Trump and other Republican candidates in 2024, and he warned House Republicans during a visit to Capitol Hill in December that he was keeping track of a "naughty list" of members who buck Trump's agenda.

Musk vowed after Election Day that his PAC would "play a significant role in primaries" next year.

## **DCCC Announces Leadership Roster for 2026 Cycle**

**Allison Mollenkamp, *Roll Call***

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee announced its leadership team for the 2026 cycle on Thursday.

Washington Rep. Suzan DelBene, who is leading House Democrats' campaign arm for a second straight cycle, released a roster, shared first with CQ Roll Call, of nearly three dozen lawmakers who will serve in fundraising, recruitment and messaging roles ahead of next year's midterm elections.

"Less than two months into the Republican governing trifecta, voters are already fed up as Republicans choose chaos and corruption over delivering on campaign promises like lowering costs," DelBene said in a statement. "Along with our Frontliners and Red to Blue candidates, this group will be instrumental in holding Republicans accountable, and I look forward to working with them to take back the House Majority in 2026."

House Republicans are defending a razor-thin majority heading into the midterms, which traditionally favor the party in opposition to the president. Democrats picked up a net of one House seat in last fall's elections – a rare bright spot in a year that saw them lose the White House and the Senate.

Reps. Lizzie Fletcher of Texas, Sara Jacobs of California, Rob Menendez of New Jersey and Mark Pocan of Wisconsin will serve as the four regional DCCC vice chairs this cycle.

Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, will return as a national finance co-chair. She'll be joined by California Rep. Ted Lieu, a member of House Democratic leadership as caucus vice chair, and Virginia Rep. Donald S. Beyer Jr. New York Rep. Gregory W. Meeks, the ranking member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, will return as abroad finance chair, helping raise money from American expatriates.

Reps. Ami Bera of California, Sharice Davids of Kansas and Greg Stanton of Arizona will be co-chairs of the Frontline program, focused on Democrats defending competitive seats. Colorado's Jason Crow, Kentucky's Morgan McGarvey and Illinois' Lauren Underwood will serve as recruitment co-chairs.

Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, and Florida Rep. Maxwell Frost, the first Generation Z member of Congress, will be the grassroots engagement chairs. Both served as organizing chairs last cycle.

Washington Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, and Minnesota Rep. Betty McCollum are returning as defense council co-chairs.

Minnesota Rep. Angie Craig, the top Democrat on the House Agriculture panel, will return as an LGBTQ+ council co-chair, joined by freshman Rep. Sarah McBride of Delaware, the first transgender member of Congress.

The labor council co-chairs, who work with organized labor groups, include Virginia Rep. Robert C. Scott, the ranking member on the House Education and Workforce Committee, Illinois Rep. Nikki Budzinski and California Rep. Linda T. Sánchez, who all held similar positions last cycle. Joining them are Reps. Val Hoyle of Oregon and Tim Kennedy of New York.

The co-chairs of the tribal engagement and active members, or TEAM, program, include Davids, New Mexico's Teresa Leger Fernández, Wisconsin's Gwen Moore and California's Raul Ruiz, who all were in similar positions last cycle. California Rep. Jared Huffman, the ranking member on the House Natural Resources Committee, and Maine Rep. Chellie Pingree join as co-chairs this year.

California freshman Luz Rivas and North Carolina Rep. Deborah K. Ross will co-chair the DCCC's WomenLEAD program, which supports female Democratic candidates.

Illinois Rep. Sean Casten will be the climate engagement chair.



## PAC Events

**February 24** | On Monday, February 24 Transamerica PAC attended a fundraising lunch for Rep. Young Kim (R-CA). Rep. Kim is a member of the House Financial Services Committee and the Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Monetary Policy. The Congresswoman provided an update on the efforts to pass a budget resolution and the upcoming government funding deadline. Additionally, she provided insight into her legislative priorities for the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress.

**February 24** | On Monday, February 24 Transamerica PAC attended a fundraising dinner for Rep. Andrew Garbarino (R-NY). Rep. Garbarino is a member of the House Financial Services Committee and the Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee on Capital Markets. The Congressman provided insight into the Republican Conference meeting earlier that day and discussed the bill he cosponsored to fully repeal the SALT Cap.

**February 25** | On Tuesday, February 25 Transamerica PAC attended a fundraising lunch for Rep. Carol Miller (R-WV). Rep. Miller is a member of the House Ways and Means Committee and is a member of the Subcommittee on Trade. The luncheon provided the perfect opportunity for the industry to educate Rep. Miller on the 2017 TCJA and its impact on the life insurance industry. It also provided ample opportunity to discuss the potential tax reconciliation package and how different provisions may be helpful or hurtful to the industry.

**February 26** | On Wednesday, February 26 Transamerica PAC attended a fundraising lunch for Rep. French Hill (R-AR). The Congressman is the Chairman of the House Financial Services Committee. The discussion focused on the Chairman's priorities for the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress and the ability of the Committee to align with the President's priorities and pass his legislative agenda. Attendees shared with the Chairman the legislative priorities they would like to see addressed by the committee and their potential impact on the industry.

**February 26** | On Wednesday, February 26 Transamerica PAC attended a fundraising dinner for Rep. Bryan Steil (R-WI). Rep. Steil is a member of the House Financial Services Committee and the Subcommittee on Capital Markets. The Congressman discussed the discussion draft that he released with Chairman French Hill to establish a framework for the issuance and operation of dollar-denominated payment stablecoins in the United States. Additionally, he provided an update on the various dynamics that existed in the lead-up to the budget resolution passage.

## Special Acknowledgements

### President Club Members

Scott Albertson, Todd Buchanan, Sean Cassidy, Catherine Collinson, Will Fuller, Chris Giovanni, Bonnie Gerst, Matt Keppler, Chad Meyers, Jamie Ohl, Maurice Perkins, Mark Pinocci, Bill Schwegler, Marijn Smit, Julie Spore, Andy Williams

### Cabinet Club Members

Matt Ahmann, Chris Conrad, Andrew DeMarco, Jim Demopolos, Mark Halloran, Wade Hampton, Lori Pope, Andrew Schaad, Ben Wadsley, Tom Wald, Darren Zino

## 2025 PAC Member Benefits

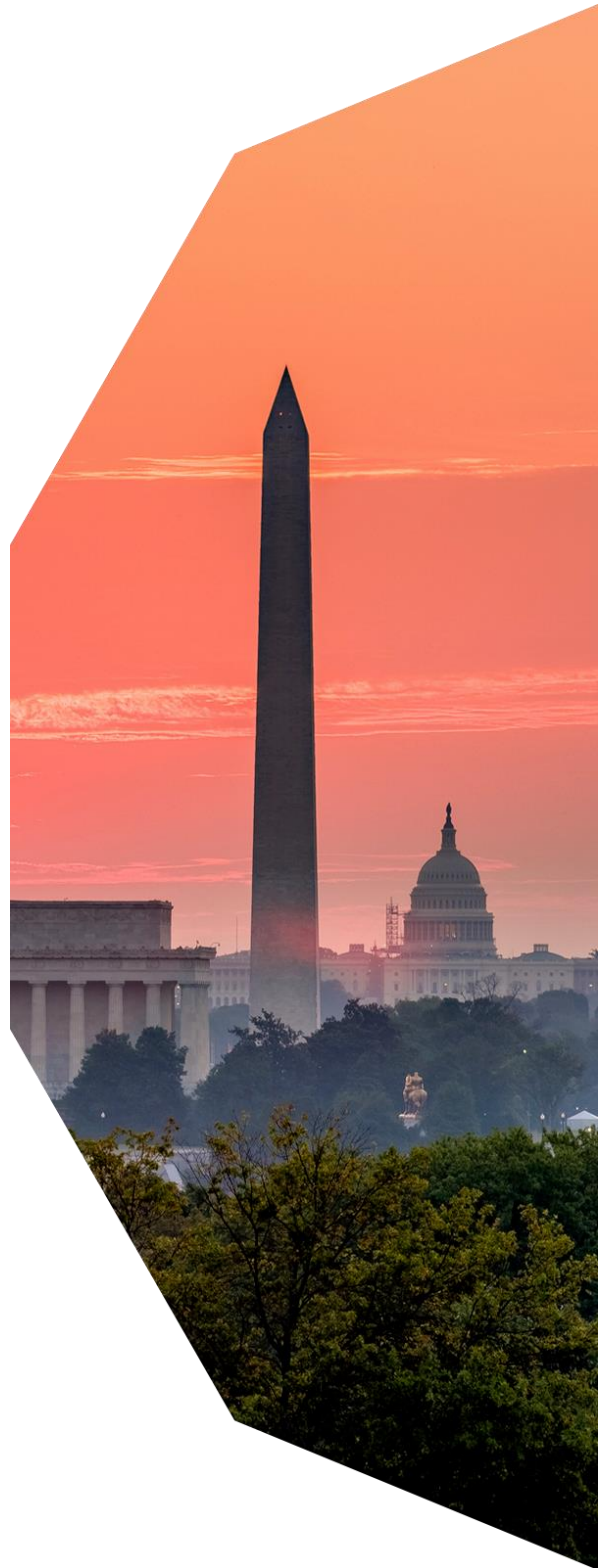
All 2025 PAC Contributors will receive full access to the Washington Weekly newsletters. Individuals who are currently in or sign up for the levels listed will receive the benefit(s) below for 2025.

Club Level	Recognized on Website	Quarterly Calls	Annual PAC Gift	Premium PAC Gift	Recognized in WW	President Club Gift*
Dollar-A-Day Club (\$365/year)	★	★				
Representative Club (\$650/year)	★	★	★			
Senate Club (\$2,000/year)	★	★	★	★		
Cabinet Club (\$3,000/year)	★	★	★	★	★	
President Club (\$5,000/year)	★	★	★	★	★	★

\*President Club Gift is given to those individuals who contribute \$5,000 in the calendar year.



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