

7 ways Republicans are split over Trump's 'big bill'

Getting Trump's tax and immigration bill through the Senate won't be easy.

May 27, 2025 at 5:00 a.m. EDT Today – Washington Post

By [Theodoric Meyer](#)

House Republicans barely passed a massive bill last week containing much of President Donald Trump's domestic agenda after months of tense negotiations between feuding factions. Now it's the Senate's turn.

Republicans are rushing to pass the bill — which would cut taxes and spending, raise the debt limit and increase defense and border security funding — by July 4. The true deadline might be later this summer, when the federal government expects to exhaust

its borrowing capacity.

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End of carousel

But getting the bill through the Senate won't be easy. Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-South Dakota) can lose no more than three Republican votes because no Democrat is expected to support it — and more than three Republicans have voiced serious concerns with the bill.

Some of them have balked at the spending cuts the House included in its version. Others are pushing for much more aggressive cuts. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) has vowed to oppose the bill unless Republicans strip out a provision to raise the debt limit by trillions of dollars.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) has pleaded for senators to revise the bill as little as possible, but Trump said Sunday that he expected the Senate to make “fairly significant” changes. Thune will need to rework it to reflect Senate Republicans' concerns and include their priorities — without tearing it up so much that it can't pass the House again once it clears the Senate.

Here are seven ways Republican senators are pressing to change the bill:

Medicaid

House Republicans spent weeks battling one another over how much to cut Medicaid funding. Now, the fight is set to play out again.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) has said she's worried about kicking Medicaid recipients who are unable to work off the program as well as the bill's effect on rural hospitals. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) said she is worried that her state will struggle to put in place new work requirements because of its outdated Medicaid payment systems. "There are provisions in there that are very, very, very challenging if not impossible for us to implement," Murkowski said.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Missouri), who has vowed to oppose the bill if it cuts Medicaid benefits, said he has concerns about new Medicaid co-pays, which he dubbed a "sick tax." He's also worried about the House bill's freeze on provider taxes, which states use to help fund their Medicaid programs and wring more matching funds from Washington. Missouri's provider taxes are relatively low right now, putting it at a disadvantage. "If you fool around with that provider tax in my state, you really risk getting to benefit cuts," Hawley said.

Making tax breaks permanent

Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), who is playing a critical role in drafting the bill as chairman of the Finance Committee, said his top priority is making permanent several business tax breaks that the House bill would allow to expire after a few years. It's also a priority for Thune.

"We believe that permanence is the way to create economy certainty, and thereby attract and incentivize capital investment in this country that creates those good-paying jobs and gets our economy growing and generates more government revenue," Thune told reporters last week.

State and local tax deduction

A handful of House Republicans from high-tax states refused to vote for the bill unless it allowed their constituents to deduct more in state and local taxes on their federal returns.

But Senate Republicans don't care about beefing up the state and local tax deduction — known as SALT — and some of them want to strip it from the bill. "I don't know why we'd give a huge tax cut to rich people who live in California, New Jersey and New York," Hawley said.

But Senate Republicans might not eliminate the deduction entirely because it was crucial to securing the votes for the bill to pass the House.

“There’s not a single one of us who gives a crap about SALT, other than it’s too generous,” Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-North Dakota) said. “But we also are pragmatic and want to pass the bill.”

Clean energy tax breaks

The House bill would scrap tax credits for wind, solar and geothermal energy that Democrats passed in 2022 unless companies start construction within 60 days of the bill becoming law. Murkowski and Sens. John Curtis (R-Utah), Thom Tillis (R-North Carolina) and Jerry Moran (R-Kansas) warned in a letter to Thune last month that they had concerns about such an approach.

Tillis suggested that he would push for a more gradual phaseout to avoid blindsiding businesses.

“If we don’t do that, then we’re no better than Joe Biden when he canceled the XL pipeline,” he said in an interview last week, referring to Biden’s 2021 decision to scrap of a long-planned crude oil pipeline. “We’ve got to figure out a way to strike that balance.”

Deeper spending cuts

While some Republican senators are worried about the spending cuts in the House bill, Republicans such as Sens. Ron Johnson (Wisconsin), Roger Marshall (Kansas) and Ted Cruz (Texas) are pushing for more.

Johnson has pledged not to vote for the bill unless it slashes federal spending to 2019 levels, and he warned that Trump would not be able to pressure him the way he leaned on House Republicans who wanted more aggressive spending cuts.

“In the House, President Trump can threaten a primary,” Johnson — who’s not up for reelection until 2028 — told reporters. “Those guys want to keep their seats. I understand the pressure. You can’t pressure me that way.”

Johnson said he is confident at least three other Republican senators are committed to standing with him — enough to block the bill from passing. Sen. Rick Scott (R-Florida) is one of them.

Byrd rule

Republican Senate staffers have been poring over the House bill to determine which parts might violate the Byrd rule. The rule, named for the late Sen. Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia), limits what can be included in Senate bills under reconciliation, the byzantine process that Republicans are using to avoid a Democratic filibuster. Senate Republicans will strip out provisions that might violate the Byrd rule — and Democrats can challenge anything they think runs afoul of it.

The House bill includes several provisions that might need to go, including a moratorium on state regulations on artificial intelligence and a ban on courts enforcing contempt citations for ignoring injunctions or temporary restraining orders.

G. William Hoagland, a former Senate Republican budget aide, and Bobby Kogan, a former Senate Democratic budget aide, both said they believed those provisions violated the rule.

Child care and other tax ideas

The House bill would increase the child tax credit temporarily to \$2,500 — but Hawley is pressing to make it more generous. “I’d like it to be double that, but anything higher,” he said.

Sen. Katie Boyd Britt (R-Alabama) is pressing Republicans to expand two child care tax breaks — and she’s far from the only one with ideas.

Republican senators have inundated the Finance Committee with requests for other tax policy changes, including scrapping the estate tax, expanding “opportunity zones” championed by Sen. Tim Scott (R-South Carolina) and bolstering the low-income housing tax credit.

“The list goes on and on,” Crapo said in March at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce summit. “There’s 200 of them. We aren’t going to do all 200. But we need to do some of those.”