

Reconciliation bill preparations get underway despite doubts

March 25, 2026 – 7:32 p.m. By Aris Folley, Savannah Behrmann and Aidan Quigley, CQ

Work on the second reconciliation bill of the 119th Congress took a baby step forward Wednesday as the House and Senate Budget Committee chairs met to review plans for the first step in the process: drafting a budget resolution.

Despite considerable doubts among Republicans that they can unify for a second time to pass a sequel to the "big beautiful bill," the key players are getting to work, calculating that the filibuster-proof reconciliation process may be the only way to enact funding for immigration enforcement and the Iran war.

"Let's put it this way: The reconciliation train is leaving the station," Senate Budget Chairman [Lindsey Graham](#), R-S.C., wrote on the social platform X after meeting with his House counterpart, Texas Rep. [Jodey C. Arrington](#).

Arrington suggested Wednesday that Republicans could begin moving on a reconciliation package that could include funds for defense and homeland security in a matter of weeks.

"We probably have to do it this spring," he said. "I think we have to get it in play over the next 60 days."

He added that the package wouldn't "have to be finalized in 60 days," but said Republicans are "going to have to have it in play." Arrington said it will be harder to coalesce the closer Republicans get to the November midterm elections.

The first major step in that process would be the adoption of a budget resolution that contains reconciliation instructions that authorizing committees would then use to write a reconciliation bill. The need for a budget resolution makes Graham and Arrington pivotal players in the GOP effort.

Arrington told reporters that Republicans on the Budget Committee will soon meet with Pentagon officials, as the party mulls using reconciliation to provide funding for the Defense Department and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, an agency within the Department of Homeland Security.

“We're going to have a meeting this week, the Budget Committee with some of the guys at the Pentagon to really dig into where is that money going to and for what, and then making sure that the savers are there to match them,” he said, apparently referring to cost savings from spending cuts or other offsets.

“We just have to get them right so they add up, and they add up in a way that gives the president, our troops, namely, what they need,” he said. “Maybe we can solve the problem of funding Homeland Security but, at the end of the day, we need to do that without adding to the ever-growing \$2 trillion deficit and the unsustainable \$39 trillion national debt.”

The idea of a reconciliation package has gained more steam in recent days as Republicans have eyed using the complex process as a maneuver to secure funding for ICE amid an ongoing partisan standoff over DHS funding.

In their latest offer to Democrats to fund the agency, Republicans proposed funding most of DHS, while withholding about \$5.5 billion for ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations division.

The proposal came as Democrats have demanded guardrails for ICE in exchange for their support to fund the agency in the wake of fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens by immigration agents earlier this year. But Democrats rejected that offer and continued to push for more guardrails.

Top GOP appropriators have also said they're awaiting more details from the Pentagon for a potential supplemental funding package as the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran continues.

But some Republicans have expressed skepticism about the chances of unifying behind a second reconciliation package this year, particularly given the party's slim margin in the House. Some conservatives are also demanding that offsets be included in the package to pay for any new spending.

On the Senate side, Budget Committee Republicans say they're already looking at potential spending cuts.

Sen. [Rick Scott](#), R-Fla., said Wednesday that committee members planned to meet after the two-week recess set to begin Friday to discuss potential offsets, but that timeline could change as GOP leadership signals recess could be pushed back due to the DHS funding fight.

"I assume if we don't recess, we'd probably meet earlier," Scott said.

A reconciliation package could include aspects of a Republican-backed voter ID bill ([S 1383](#)), after President Donald Trump had tied the issues together earlier this week. That legislation, currently being debated in the Senate, would require proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote and a photo ID to vote.

But some GOP critics have warned that the voter ID measure [stands almost no chance](#) of passing in a reconciliation bill because of the Senate's "Byrd rule," which limits the type of legislation eligible for that filibuster-free process.

“The purpose of the second reconciliation bill is to make sure there is adequate funding to secure our homeland,” Graham said in a statement earlier Wednesday. “I also think we have many opportunities to improve voter integrity through reconciliation.”

Any reconciliation package this year would be significantly smaller than the giant package ([PL 119-21](#)) Republicans enacted last year, said Senate Majority Leader [John Thune](#), R-S.D.

“To succeed, it would have to be pretty narrowly focused,” he said.

But Republicans have acknowledged that the limits of budget reconciliation present a tough task toward getting key elements of the voter ID bill — dubbed the "SAVE America Act" by supporters — across the finish line. Budget experts are skeptical that much of the law could survive the parliamentary scrutiny the process requires.

Sen. [Mike Lee](#), R-Utah, a member of the Budget Committee who has been leading the push to debate the election-related legislation, said on X, “It’d be great [if] SAVE

America fit within the rigid definition of 'budgetary' for purposes of budget reconciliation. But it doesn't."