

House Democrats prepare to make Mike Johnson's life hell

Andrew Solender

House Democrats are gearing up to put maximum pressure on House Speaker Mike Johnson's (R-La.) agonizingly small House majority.

Why it matters:

Just a few complications on the GOP side could hobble Johnson's efforts to pass President-elect Trump's sweeping agenda, fund the government and raise the debt ceiling.

On any GOP-only legislation, there is "going to be enormous pressure" on Republican centrists to break away, said Rep. Joe Morelle (D-N.Y.).

Morelle pointed to Rep. Mike Lawler (R-N.Y.), predicting some GOP bills will be "problematic for him" as he mulls a run for New York governor.

Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif.) said of flipping GOP members: "*It's hard, but it can be done. And if we can entice some of those people on the other side to do that, it can stop a lot of bad things from happening.*"

State of play:

The **five-seat majority** that Johnson has struggled to manage in the 118th Congress is set to dwindle next year. Democrats managed to flip slightly more House seats than Republicans, and President-elect **Trump has plucked several GOP House members for his Cabinet**. Republicans may end up with as small as a **temporary one- or two-seat majority** until seats can be filled with special elections. That puts House Republicans in a significantly weaker position than they were in during Trump's first term in 2017, when they had a 20-seat buffer.

What they're saying:

Several House Democrats told Axios that there is already a sentiment that **dutifully attending major votes** will be paramount. "*Given the narrow margins, there's going to be a real emphasis on making sure people are here,*" said Morelle.

- "*To vote against shi**y legislation ... if I get struck by lightning, I'm going to drag myself here,*" said Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.).
- House Minority Whip Katherine Clark (D-Mass.), in a statement to Axios, said showing up to votes is "*what House Democrats do every day.*"

Yes, but:

Democrats **may face complications on their own side** – with a high risk of lawmakers in districts Trump won **defecting on key votes**.

Rep. Jared Golden (D-Maine), a co-chair of the centrist Blue Dog Coalition, told Axios that Democratic leadership can only "*count on me to do what I think is best for Maine and the country.*"

Golden hinted that **he could end up supporting Trump's tariff proposals**, for instance, pointing to his own bill to institute a universal 10% tariff.

The intrigue:

Even some Republicans acknowledged that governing may be **difficult and chaotic with a tiny House majority** and Trump as president. One House Republican forecast a "high" likelihood of a government shutdown because it "*really can just take one or two Republican members of Congress to twist the president's arm off now.*"

The lawmaker added that "the tables have kind of been reversed to where the House Freedom Caucus will just do whatever President Trump says and the people in the middle who are in tougher districts won't."

The other side:

Some Republicans argued Trump will be a focal point around which GOP lawmakers can rally in a way they couldn't over the last two years.

"*If Trump's going to sign [a bill], you immediately have a momentum that wasn't there before,*" said one senior House Republican.

Said a third House Republican: *"I think you're looking at a very prepared, very focused, very mission-driven Trump second term ... I think it's going to be much cleaner, much more orderly."*