Mike Johnson's Push for a Second Reconciliation Bill Falls Flat at Republicans' Retreat

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DORAL, Fla. — House Speaker Mike Johnson wants to usher through another reconciliation bill ahead of the midterms. House Republicans aren't optimistic that it's possible.

On Tuesday, House Republicans debated whether to pursue a second partisan budget bill as part of their policy retreat at President Donald Trump's golf resort in Doral, Florida.

During one meeting, Rep. Jason Smith, the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, told his colleagues that a second reconciliation bill wouldn't be possible, two sources familiar with the conversation told NOTUS. Asked about his comments, Smith, who worked extensively on the first reconciliation package, told NOTUS he would be supportive of finding a path, but confirmed his skepticism.

"If we can find a way to unify the conference on something, it would be excellent and brilliant," Smith said. "I don't see a path."

Rep. Tom Cole, the chair of the House Appropriations Committee, also told House Republicans he was skeptical that the conference could successfully pass another reconciliation bill, particularly on the short timeline they have, three sources told NOTUS.

Others have been more blunt: "Dead as shit," is how one senior House Republican aide, requesting anonymity to speak candidly, described the possibility of a second Republican budget reconciliation bill.

Johnson has been a major driver behind the push to start negotiating a second catch-all Republican policy bill, though even he is tempering expectations.

"It will not be as big, but it'd be just as beautiful," Johnson told reporters Tuesday, alluding to the tax and social policy law Republicans passed last year and that President Donald Trump dubbed the "One Big Beautiful Bill".

"I am in the process, as is necessary in a single-vote, razor-thin-margin majority like I have, to find consensus basically by unanimity," Johnson said.

Republicans currently have a one-seat majority in the House and plenty of internal disagreements. The budget reconciliation process allows for the majority party to pass policies with a simple majority in the Senate, but it would require near-unanimous buy-in.

That's tough in normal circumstances, as the reconciliation debate from last summer proved.

Those challenges are only further complicated by an election year — one where Democrats have the momentum. Many of the conference's more moderate Republicans, whose votes would be needed for another budget bill, did not attend the retreat this week. Neither did Rep. Thomas Massie, a frequent critic of his own party, who voted against the first reconciliation bill.

"I'd like to see whatever they can get," Cole told NOTUS on Monday of a second reconciliation bill, laughing slightly. "I'd like to see something that Massie would like to vote for, too. That would be great."

One senior House Republican told NOTUS that a second reconciliation bill is "highly unlikely" to happen. The lawmaker added that there's concern about ongoing fights — Department of Homeland Security funding, a potential supplemental funding bill for the war in Iran and ongoing appropriations negotiations — that take the focus away from a massive budget bill.

"We got our work cut out for us. It's a tough deal," the senior House Republican said.

The first reconciliation bill, which lowered taxes, funded the president's mass-deportation campaign and made sweeping cuts to social-welfare programs like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, passed after weeks of arm-twisting, as well as all-nighters and record-long House votes — the opposite of the sunny golf resort that House Republicans are working from through Wednesday.

"If we get enough [support] that even our own colleagues stay together, I think that's where leadership's problem is right now," Rep. Mike Bost, a Republican from Illinois, told NOTUS of the challenges of a second reconciliation bill. "I know the speaker wants it. He would love that."

House Republicans were debating whether to pursue a second reconciliation bill even before they began negotiating the first one. The latest skepticism isn't new, either.

In late February, at a retreat for House Republican leadership in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, only the chairs of the House Budget Committee and the Republican Study Committee, Reps. Jodey Arrington and August Pfluger, joined Johnson in voicing support for a second reconciliation bill, three sources told NOTUS.

Others, like the chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Rep. Brett Guthrie — whose committee oversees Medicaid — relayed concerns about finding more cuts to pay for another bill, a source familiar with the comments told NOTUS.

Nevertheless, Johnson has been persistent about pushing Republicans to take up the effort.

Fast forward two weeks — and back in Florida — Johnson, Pfluger and Arrington are again trying to sell their conference on the second reconciliation bill.

Back in the Capitol on Monday, Senate Majority Leader John Thune told reporters that he and Johnson “talk week to week” and “have discussed” the possibility of another reconciliation process. They’re also talking with “relevant committee chairs and our members to see what types of ideas they have for a potential reconciliation bill,” but no decisions have been finalized.

“I think you have to answer, again, the hard question of: What is your picture of victory at the end?” Thune said of planning a reconciliation bill.

Meanwhile, House Republicans at the retreat are still trying to figure out the best way to sell the first bill to the American public.