

How Trump's DOGE cuts package could put GOP in a bind

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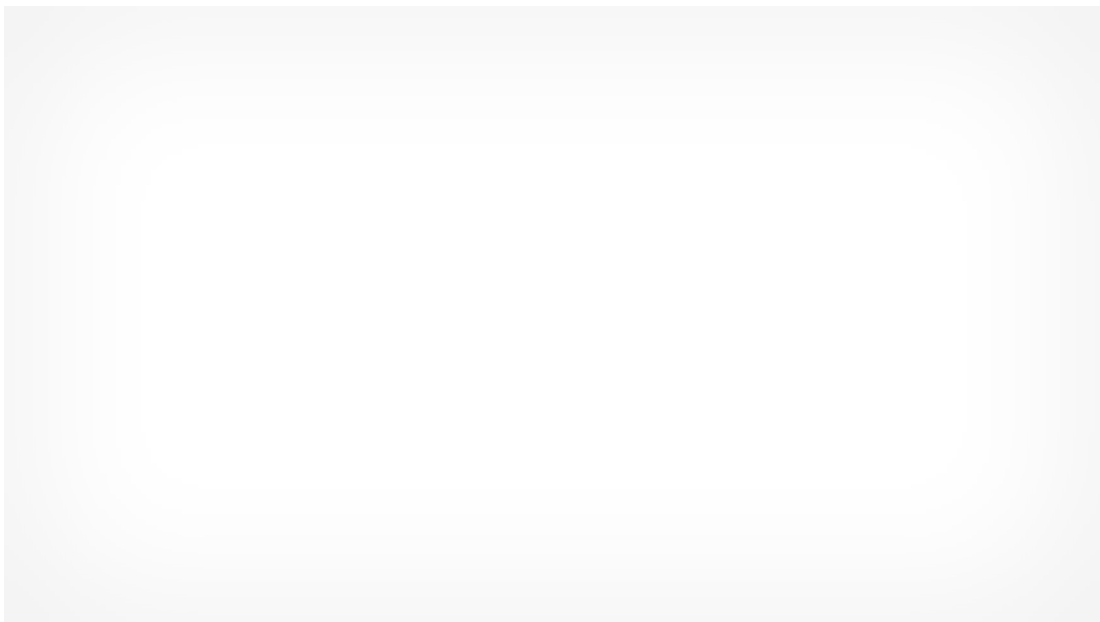
The sun sets behind the US Capitol Building on June 1, 2025 in Washington, DC. Kevin Carter/Getty Images

(CNN) — DOGE isn't dead, both President Donald Trump and Elon Musk assured last week as Musk said goodbye to the Trump administration. But the already dicey effort Musk led could soon become even more so.

That's because the White House is now asking Congress to sign off on some of the cuts that the Department of Government Efficiency sought to make unilaterally.

And the first set of cuts the White House has sent over to Capitol Hill epitomizes the dilemmas that lay ahead for Republicans. The dollar amount – \$9.4 billion – is a tiny fraction of the federal budget, and the administration appears to be targeting low-hanging political fruit. But polling suggests the votes could still be tough ones.

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The idea is to make the cuts more permanent by having Congress pass what's known as a "rescissions" package. This would codify the DOGE cuts into law, so that they can't be reversed by the next administration or overturned by the courts.

Musk and fiscal conservatives have pushed for this, aiming to put a more lasting stamp of approval on cuts that have failed to live up to Musk's billing and could ultimately prove to be even less than meets the eye. The effort is also important as many of the same Trump allies have balked at the price tag of the president's "Big Beautiful Bill" and want evidence that the administration is serious about spending cuts.

Speaker Mike Johnson said Tuesday afternoon that the House had received the White House's request and vowed to put it on the floor for a vote "as quickly as possible." A lot will depend on how it's received and whether it passes. Such legislation needs only a majority of both chambers, meaning Republicans have the votes if they keep their side in line.

“We are intending to be strategic, work with Congress, see what they’re willing to do, and if they pass this, we’ll send up many more,” Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought told Fox News on Tuesday.

But doing that is no small task. Spending cuts are often popular in theory but much less so in practice, when you get into specific things that will be taken away. Musk’s and DOGE’s efforts quickly fell out of favor with the American public, with polls showing both have become rather unpopular and Musk’s efforts to impact a high-profile state Supreme Court election in Wisconsin falling flat.

It’s not difficult to see this legislative effort struggling and Trump – who has always talked much more about cutting spending than actually doing it – getting cold feet.

Let’s take a look at what’s in the first rescissions package, and how it could test Republicans politically.

NPR and PBS funding

The White House is aiming to make good on a long-standing conservative push to end federal funding of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which funds NPR and PBS. This accounts for \$1.1 billion of the rescissions package, according to Johnson's office Tuesday.

But just because conservatives have been pushing this for a long time doesn't mean it's popular.

A March Pew Research Center poll showed Americans supported continuing the funding rather than ending it, 43% to 24%. (About one-third of Americans offered no opinion.)

Republicans and Republican-leaning voters were more in favor of the cuts, but even there it didn't seem to be a huge priority. While 44% wanted to end the funding, 19% – 1 in 5 – wanted to continue it.

And past polling suggests this could be even more unpopular than those numbers suggest, depending on how the cut is sold.

A 2017 Quinnipiac University poll, for instance, asked about the prospect of *eliminating* the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Americans back then said it was a “bad idea,” 70% to 25%. Getting 7 in 10 Americans to align on any given issue is difficult, but this one did the trick.

This could also be a hurdle for some key Republican votes in the Senate and the closely divided House. Some Republicans from rural areas could worry this would decimate key news and educational programming in their areas.





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Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, for instance, wrote an op-ed last month hailing public broadcasting and warning the administration against cuts. She called it an “invaluable resource that saves lives in Alaska.” She noted some local stations in Alaska rely on the funding to operate – for as much as 30% to 70% of their budgets – at relatively low cost to taxpayers.

Indeed, as CNN’s Brian Stelter noted in April, the annual budget of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is about \$535 million, or \$1.60 per taxpayer. That makes it a tiny drop in the bucket when it comes to budget-cutting – but one the people who rely on the programming could quickly notice, particularly if it suddenly disappears.

The Pew survey found about 1 in 5 American adults say they regularly get news from both NPR and PBS. It’s a group that skews toward Democratic-leaning Americans, but still includes about 1 in 10 Republican-leaning ones.

USAID funding

The lion’s share of the money in the first rescissions package (\$8.3 billion, according to Johnson’s office) deals with what it calls “wasteful foreign aid spending.” That gets to a key target of Musk and DOGE: the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

And Republicans – including former USAID cheerleaders like Secretary of State Marco Rubio – have largely been in lockstep against this funding

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This one is a little more complicated, politically.

On the one hand, Americans generally think we send too much money overseas. A February KFF poll showed 58% of Americans said the United States spends “too much” on foreign aid.

But people also vastly over-estimate the amount of money involved. The same poll showed the average person estimated foreign aid was 26% of the budget; the actual number is about 1%. When the pollster told respondents about the actual figure, the percentage who said the government spends “too much” dropped from 58% all the way down to 34%.

Among Republicans – the group most critical of foreign aid – it dropped from 81% to 50%.

We’ve also seen that Americans generally don’t like the idea of ending most or all foreign aid. A March Pew poll showed Americans opposed ending “most” USAID programs, 45% to 35%. The gap was similar in a March Reuters/Ipsos poll that asked about shuttering USAID. And a February CNN poll conducted by SSRS showed Americans said Trump shutting down entire government agencies like USAID and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was a “bad thing,” 53% to 28%.

The rescissions package doesn’t seem to go that far. Based on what OMB teased on social media Tuesday, it instead focuses on programs that might sound ridiculous to some. The administration has often misstated what these programs actually do, but many of them are obscure-sounding. They involve things like cultural programs in foreign countries and often things like DEI, gender equity and LGBTQ issues.

And there, the administration could be on more solid ground. A Pew survey, for instance, showed that just 34% of Americans support foreign aid for “art and cultural activities.”

But some of the measures could test public support. For instance, the administration said it's requesting a rescission for \$135 million in funding to the World Health Organization, which polls suggest is relatively popular. According to OMB, that includes money for circumcision, vasectomies and condoms in the African country of Zambia – part of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program.

PEPFAR is popular. And the Pew survey showed 83% of Americans support using foreign aid for “providing medicine and medical supplies to developing countries.”

Ultimately, the GOP's ability to sell these cuts – and feel confident voting for them – will depend in large part on whether Americans just see them broadly as cuts to obscure foreign aid programs, or if they view them as relatively modest investments in important programs.

The real drama could come if the White House asks for more significant USAID cuts on programs beyond the ones they've cited in their talking points – programs that account for a much larger chunk of that 1%. The administration has struggled, for instance, to account for its changes to PEPFAR, which reports indicate have jeopardized the war against AIDS in Africa.

The administration seems to view these initial rescissions cuts as the most politically palatable. But even they could test lawmakers' tolerance for signing off on DOGE's work – and could determine whether Republicans in Washington will press forward in actually voting on cuts.

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