

Republicans Love Trump's Spending Cuts. Just Not in Their States.

Even as they praise the president's unilateral actions to slash federal spending, G.O.P. lawmakers have quietly moved to seek carve outs or exemptions for their own constituents.



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By Maya C. Miller and Catie Edmondson

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Republicans in Congress have responded to President Trump's unilateral moves to freeze federal spending, dismantle programs and fire civil servants with a collective shrug, staying mostly silent and even praising him as he circumvents the legislative branch.

But in recent days, as his slash-and-burn campaign to remake the government has begun to affect their states and districts, some Republicans have tried to push back in subtle ways. They have sought carve outs and special consideration for agriculture programs, scientific research and more, even as they cheered on Mr. Trump's overall approach.

Their swift and quiet moves to protect their own pieces of the federal spending pie without critiquing Mr. Trump are an early indication of the political realities that could pose obstacles to the president's push. Many programs he has targeted for cost-cutting have entrenched constituencies in Congress built up by Republicans

over many years. It is one reason that shrinking the size of the federal government will be a mammoth task, despite the G.O.P.'s posture of maximum deference to Mr. Trump.

Take Senator Katie Britt of Alabama, the successor to Senator Richard C. Shelby, who retired in 2022 at age 88 as one of the last big-time pork barrel legends in Congress. Mr. Shelby, Ms. Britt's former boss, was renowned for his record of steering billions of dollars in federal spending to his state over a 36-year career.

Ms. Britt was one of the first Republicans to raise concerns at home soon after the Trump administration directed the National Institutes of Health to slash \$4 billion in overhead costs for medical research grantees, a move that has since been paused by a federal judge. Ms. Britt, whose state has received more than \$518 million in N.I.H. grants for projects currently active there, told a local news outlet that she would press administration officials to take a "smart, targeted approach" to cuts so as to "not hinder lifesaving, groundbreaking research at high-achieving institutions" such as the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

In the House, a group of Republicans from farm states and districts introduced legislation this week that aims to salvage a foreign aid program targeted for extinction by Mr. Trump as part of his effort to wipe out the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The bill would transfer oversight of the Food for Peace program, which purchases crops at market price from American farmers and distributes them to hungry people abroad, from U.S.A.I.D. to the Agriculture Department. The lawmakers argued that their legislation fulfills the spirit of what Mr. Trump calls his "mandate" to slim down the federal bureaucracy and make it more efficient.

"By moving Food for Peace to U.S.D.A., the program can continue to equip American producers to serve hungry people while providing more transparency and efficiency as to how taxpayer dollars are stewarded," Representative Tracey Mann, Republican of Kansas and the lead sponsor of the House bill, said in a statement on Tuesday.

After Mr. Trump ordered a 90-day freeze of foreign aid shipments, Senator Jerry Moran, also of Kansas, was among the only Republicans who publicly urged Secretary of State Marco Rubio to quickly resume foreign food aid shipments abroad so American growers, including sorghum farmers in his state, would not lose out on a major market for their surplus product. American growers sold about \$713 million of goods to Food for Peace program in the 2023 fiscal year.

And in a letter last week to the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget by Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, the chairwoman of the Indian Affairs Committee, she asked the Trump administration to direct federal agencies not to apply any funding restrictions from Mr. Trump's executive order targeting diversity programs to American Indian tribes.

Not all Republicans are pushing back on Mr. Trump's efforts to slash federal spending, even when those cuts hit programs in their states.

Senator Bernie Moreno of Ohio, whose state has received more than \$1 billion in N.I.H. research grants, said he supported the move to cut overhead costs, arguing that taxpayer money should not be used to cover expenses like lighting, heating and building maintenance.

"If you ask the average American, 'We're spending a billion dollars to cure childhood cancer, how much of a billion dollars should go toward curing childhood cancer?' They'd probably say a billion," Mr. Moreno said. "The idea that 60 percent goes toward indirect costs, overhead, is insane."

The N.I.H. said that less than half of that, about 26 percent of grant dollars it distributed last year, went to such costs.

The G.O.P. lawmakers seeking reprieves from Mr. Trump's cuts are quick to embrace his message that federal spending is out of control, while arguing that their state's or district's slice of government funding is critical.

Ms. Britt said in an interview that she had recently talked to Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Mr. Trump's nominee to be health secretary, to impress upon him the importance of protecting vital medical research taking place in Alabama that she said "ultimately

saves lives.”

“He said he absolutely understood that we need to keep both research and innovation alive and well, and you know that you have to have the best technology and laboratory facilities to be able to do that,” Ms. Britt said, speaking of Mr. Kennedy. “He committed to continuing that conversation and working to make sure that we find a real solution moving forward.”

Senator Ted Budd of North Carolina, whose state includes two of the largest recipients of N.I.H. grants in Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said he agreed with the Trump administration’s move to limit the amount of taxpayer money used for overhead costs. But he conceded that the universities would likely need time to adjust to their new financial reality.

“There’s great research being done by all of our institutions; we need to protect that,” Mr. Budd said. “I think the White House wants to protect that.”

Still, Democrats are working to capitalize on the potential political impact of Mr. Trump’s spending cuts by attacking Republicans in Congress, especially those from competitive districts, for swallowing moves that harm their constituents.

House Majority PAC, the House Democrats’ main political action group, sent out a message this week titled, “Vulnerable House Republicans Hang Farmers Out To Dry,” which noted how the funding freeze was hitting farmers around the country and singled out several Republican lawmakers by name, including Representatives David Valadao of California, Zach Nunn of Iowa and Don Bacon of Nebraska.

Maya C. Miller covers Congress and is a Times Fellow, a program for journalists early in their careers. She is based in Washington.

Catie Edmondson covers Congress for The Times.

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