

TRUMP'S ARTICLE I MANAGEMENT

There have been a few stories in the wake of last week's effective town halls about Trump's efforts to reach out to increasingly uncomfortable Republicans.

First, HuffPo got a number of Republicans to express concern about Trump's latest trade war with its closest trading partners. While "Most Republicans in Congress, however, either said Trump's tariffs were a good idea or offered only muted criticism," Chuck Grassley and House Ag Committee Chair Glenn Thompson expressed confidence farmers would be protected somehow.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) suggested he would be seeking an exemption for his state, which is a leading producer of corn, soybeans and pork in the United States. Farmers in Iowa and other states rely heavily on Canadian potash, a key fertilizer ingredient, for their crops.

"Potash coming from Canada would be 25% higher," Grassley said. "I assume I'm going to hear from farmers to contact the secretary of commerce to try to get a waiver."

[snip]

Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-Pa.), chair of the House Agriculture Committee, said he believed Canada and Mexico had already stepped up border security. Canada had announced a \$1 billion border security plan that included new helicopters, while Mexico said it would deploy 10,000 national guardsmen.

"I'm not sure what additional, like – the 25% tariffs of Canada – they've really stepped up. So has Mexico, actually, on the border. But I'm not a part of those negotiations, so I don't

know exactly what the president is trying to extract additionally," Thompson told HuffPost.

The farm sector exports a lot of produce and is uniquely vulnerable in a trade war. When Trump imposed tariffs on Chinese imports during his first term, and the Chinese government retaliated with tariffs on U.S. exports in kind, the Trump administration bailed out agriculture producers with nearly \$30 billion worth of direct payments.

Thompson said if there's another protracted trade war, the government would once again help out farmers.

"I'm hoping that we won't find ourselves in a situation of sustained retaliatory tariffs on our farmers. If we are, we'll be prepared to deal with that," he said.

Aside from one lawsuit seeking to force the government to restore access to climate information, I know of no lawsuits representing the many farmers whom Trump's freeze on Inflation Reduction Act spending has harmed, though many risk bankruptcy because approved spending has not been reimbursed. These comments suggest that farmers imagine they'll be made whole via other means, political favors.

There've already been signs that Trump has placated Republicans whose own constituents were targeted by his rash cuts. For example, it didn't take long for elimination of Indian Health Services that would have disproportionately hit Alaska, Oklahoma, and South Dakota to be reversed. By offering cuts and waivers, Trump uses preferential treatment for Republicans to sustain support for actions that harm the entire country.

Yesterday, Trump took a similar approach with DOGE, sending Elon Musk to meet with Republican Senators and House members (but not Democrats) to placate them on DOGE cuts. The reports from

the Senate meeting reveal how meek key, purportedly powerful, Senators were in the meeting with Musk, begging that he adopt a more considered approach.

"Every day's another surprise," Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said of the daily bombshells from Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

"It would be better to allow Cabinet secretaries to carefully review their departments and then make surgical, strategic decisions on what programs and people should be cut and then come back to Congress for approval," she said.

Collins argued a methodical approach to reforming government would be better than what she called Musk's "sledgehammer approach."

A second GOP senator said colleagues raised concerns about Musk's leadership of DOGE and shared stories about how funding freezes and firings have impacted constituents.

"They were presenting some of the compelling stories and some of them shared about terminations at VA hospitals and how it impacted constituents and how there was no answer" from Musk's team, the senator said.

"Another question was, 'Who do we bring it to when we have these issues?'" the source added.

One of the Republican senators digging for answers is Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chair Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), who told The Hill he's trying to find out whether the firing of 2,400 probationary VA employees would impact services for veterans.

"We're asking that question," he said.

"We want to know [what] positions [are affected]. We've been reassured that it doesn't affect direct care, but we're looking for more information.

[snip]

"If I get confirmed as the head of an agency, a Cabinet-level position, [and] I've got somebody else that is pretending – or that is acting as my boss, that's a real problem," [Thom Tillis] added. "At the end of the day, you've got to have all those employees thinking that you're looking out for the agencies and their best interests."

Tillis said that if Trump's Cabinet officials "want to be viewed as the heads of these agencies," they need to balance Musk's recommendations to cut staff with their missions to provide services and advance U.S. interests.

"They need to say, 'This is all good stuff, but now it has to go into the context of everything else I'm doing to run this agency, not just efficiencies.' Because you've still got to keep the lights on, you've still got to provide acceptable service levels for the people that you're tasked with serving," he said.

Other reports describe suggestions, started by Rand Paul, to codify all DOGE's cuts in a recission package.

"I love what Elon is doing. I love the cutting of the waste. I love finding all the crazy crap that we're spending overseas. But to make it real, to make it go beyond the moment of the day, it needs to come back," the Kentucky Republican said.

Musk huddled behind closed doors with House Republicans on Wednesday evening

and spelled out DOGE's efforts to uncover wasteful spending, an initiative that many Republicans applauded.

But others emerged with a more skeptical view.

"When you have a very small group with a broad set of powers, able to inflict dramatic change on institutions without a lot of knowledge, that means the process of cleaning up afterwards is going to be extensive," said Representative Frank Lucas of Oklahoma.

Senate Republicans said Musk, a top adviser to Trump, was "elated" by Paul's suggestion that the White House request congressional approval to rescind spending through a legislative process that would circumvent the Senate's 60-vote filibuster.

"He was, like, so happy," said Senator Lindsey Graham, who chairs the Senate Budget Committee.

"What we've got to do as Republicans is capture their work product, put it in a bill and vote on it. So, the White House, I'm urging them to come up with a rescission package," the South Carolina Republican added.

None of this is surprising: That Trump is placating Republicans with doubts about his destructive attack on the US with direct outreach. Indeed, we've seen hints that it has been going on this entire time.

For now, it's simply confirmation that even the most powerful Republicans, like Appropriations Chair Susan Collins, are asking for no more than this, meekly suggesting that maybe Cabinet Members should be allowed to act like Cabinet Members. And also confirmation that more members of Congress are willing to share, under their own name.

Thus far, Trump is making a sustained attack on the United States and Republican Members of Congress are still easily bought off with tailored exemptions rather than policies that serve the common good. That may change, but thus far, Article I remains solidly and easily co-opted.

Update: I should have included this story, which focuses more in House members, including this wisdom from House Appropriations Chair Tom Cole:

“With all due respect to Mr. Musk, he doesn’t have a vote up here. ... [Give] courtesy to the members. They’re the ones that have to go home and defend these decisions, not you. So why don’t you give them a heads-up,” Rep. Tom Cole (Oklahoma) said Tuesday before the meeting. “You are certainly complicating the lives of individual members, and you might be making some mistakes and hurting some innocent individuals in the process.”

[snip]

Cole, who as chair of the House Appropriations Committee is responsible for funding the government, said that while he believes DOGE has “uncovered some amazing things,” he has observed that some staffers “clearly don’t know what [they’re] talking about” based on some fiscal decisions he has seen them make.