

**01 | THROWING
SAND
IN THE
REPUBLICANS'
GEARS**

For the first time since 2017, Republicans control the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Presidency. Unlike the first Trump Administration, however, they have a ready playbook and a commander-in-chief who is moving without hesitation to discard the most fundamental democratic rules and norms in service of establishing absolute power. The stakes are higher than they have ever been before, and Democrats have an obligation to meet the moment with commensurate creativity, energy, and resolve.

In just the first nine months of his presidency, Donald Trump, aided and abetted by the Republican Party that he now controls, has wreaked havoc on our communities. He has weaponized immigration enforcement to round up and tear apart families, often detaining and brutalizing immigrants — and, in some cases, American citizens¹ — who are playing by the rules. He has turned 26 Federal Plaza into an illegal detention center, allowing little to no oversight by Congressional leaders, while empowering his masked ICE agents to continuously use excessive force².

Trump's so-called "America First" energy policy has proven to be nothing but a pretext to fill the coffers of his oil and gas donors while systematically dismantling and attacking safe, clean, renewable energy sources, like wind and solar. And his irresponsible and crudely imposed tariffs on foreign goods and products have led to higher costs and fewer jobs, as companies raise prices and cut labor costs to absorb the monetary hit from what amounts to a massive tax increase³.

¹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/immigration-dhs-american-citizens-arrested-detained-against-will>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn0rxrd444o>

³ <https://fortune.com/2025/10/06/trump-tariffs-tax-capital-morgan-stanley-economist-michael-gapen/>

And with his One Big Beautiful Bill (OB3), Trump passed the most punitive piece of legislation for working people in American history. The bill explicitly trades nearly \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts for the richest by cutting over \$1 trillion from Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other social benefit programs — all while increasing the national debt by \$4 trillion. Families making \$24,000 or less will lose \$1,200 per year, while those making \$700,000 or more will gain \$13,600 per year from tax cuts⁴.

This attack on healthcare and food programs cannot be understated. For millions of Americans and New Yorkers, Medicaid and SNAP can be the difference between life and death. By targeting cost-sharing agreements, implementing work requirements, and shrinking the Medicaid program, the bill leaves two million New Yorkers at risk of losing their health insurance coverage, with 1.5 million anticipated to become uninsured⁵.

Additionally, 300,000 New York households are expected to lose their SNAP benefits.

According to a study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania's Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, the bill will lead to at least 51,000 otherwise preventable deaths annually⁶.

The Role of Congressional Democrats

In all of this, Trump relies on loyal and pliant Congressional Republicans. OB3 passed thanks to the cooperation of Speaker Mike Johnson, Senate Majority Leader John Thune,

⁴ <https://democrats-budget.house.gov/resources/fact-sheet/trumps-big-ugly-law-steals-poor-give-ultra-rich>

⁵ <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-unveils-devastating-impacts-republicans-big-ugly-bill-new-york-state>

⁶ <https://ldi.upenn.edu/our-work/research-updates/trump-senate-bill-seen-causing-51000-preventable-deaths-annually/>

and every single Republican member of Congress. Either active or passive assent from Republicans in Congress, on a unanimous or near-unanimous basis, has been a key enabling feature of Trump II.

The other piece of this equation is the expectation that Congressional Democrats will be unable or unwilling to stop administration actions, or at least slow things down. But while there are, undoubtedly, real limitations on the power of the House minority to stop the majority, there is more that Congressional Democrats can and should do to throw sand in the works. We are the opposition party, and we must start acting like it.

In fact, voters are practically begging Democrats to do *something, anything* to stop or slow this aggressive Republican wave of power. According to a poll published by the *Wall Street Journal* in July, the Democratic Party's popularity is the lowest it has been in three decades; 63% of respondents held an unfavorable view of the party⁷. Voters are wholly unconvinced of the party's ability to understand, represent, and deliver for them. Even compared to Donald Trump, whose favorability ratings are consistently low, Democrats are seen as an uninspired and tired resistance force. Our brand has been diminished to one of exhaustion and defeat, and we must show voters that we have the political foresight and the sheer will to earn back their support.

Putting up effective roadblocks to Donald Trump's authoritarian agenda, exposing Congressional Republicans' complicity, and shifting the country away from reactionary

⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/democratic-party-poll-voter-confidence-july-2025-9db38021>

revanchism towards an era of progress requires a multi-pronged, comprehensive strategy that relies as much on political shrewdness as it does creative policymaking.

As part of my campaign to represent New York's 12th District in Congress, I am publishing a series of plans that, together, will detail a comprehensive approach to fighting back. I will cover what Democrats in the minority should be doing now (and what they should continue doing in the unfortunate event that we do not regain control of the House in the mid-terms), how we can leverage power if we win back the House to restore the broken pieces of democracy, and finally, how we can deliver a proactive, forward-looking policy agenda that the American people can believe in.

This first paper in the series focuses on tactics that Congressional Democrats **right now** can use, or use more, to slow Trump's agenda and make it as painful as possible for Republicans to do the President's bidding.

Strategy 1: Force Congressional Republicans to Vote on Controversial Trump

Directives

As President, Trump has aggressively exercised executive power to advance his agenda. He has used executive orders to unleash the power of his office to declare war on immigrants, kill renewable energy projects, deploy the national guard into Washington, D.C., and

arbitrarily impose sweeping tariffs on countries from Canada to Japan.⁸ While the legality of this use of executive power is being litigated in courts across the country, Congressional Democrats can force Republicans to vote explicitly on these individual actions.

While Republicans have a range of tools at their disposal to block unwanted legislation from hitting the floor for a vote, they have no control over what Democrats introduce and, in some cases, they are statutorily required to allow for a full chamber vote on certain bills or resolutions.

Specifically, House and Senate majorities must allow for full chamber votes on “privileged resolutions.” And — highly pertinent to Trump’s abuse of executive power — joint resolutions to overturn an emergency declaration under the National Emergencies Act⁹ are privileged. In other words, Democrats can force Republican members of Congress to vote on some of the most controversial moves of the Trump Administration.

This tactic has been used in a few instances, the most recent of which was related to the “national energy emergency” Trump declared in order to provide subsidies to the oil and gas industry while undoing many of the benefits the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided. The IRA, passed under President Biden, was a once-in-a-generation piece of legislation that simultaneously spurred domestic energy production and helped to jumpstart an economic and workforce development boom across the country. Importantly, the bill ushered billions of dollars of investments into Republican districts. In fact, over half of the clean energy

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/08/22/us/politics/trump-emergency-immigration-tariffs-crime.html>

⁹ <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46567>

projects catalyzed by the IRA benefitted Republican-held districts, including a \$100 billion investment in NY-22 represented by Republican Rep. Brandon Williams¹⁰.

But since Trump has taken office, with the help of Congressional Republicans, nearly 40,000 jobs and over \$21 billion in investments have been lost in Republican districts across the country. Energy bills are up 10% across the board, with the biggest increase hitting Missouri, whose constituents will see their annual utility bill grow by \$561 on average¹¹.

In response, on February 3, 2025, Senators Tim Kaine and Martin Heinrich introduced a resolution to terminate Trump’s national energy emergency declaration. The resolution was put to a vote in the full Senate and was defeated 47-52 along party lines¹². They then introduced the same resolution eight months later on the same issue, forcing Republicans to once again vote against their constituents, who are facing skyrocketing energy and utility costs.

We should use this strategy far more frequently to force Republicans to choose between the most aggressive parts of the Trump agenda and the interests of voters. Trump has declared a number of national emergencies through executive order — one at the southern border¹³, economic security emergencies¹⁴, and an energy emergency¹⁵. Speaker Johnson has surreptitiously used the House Rules committee to thwart Democrats’ ability to use this tactic by passing legislation to “stop” the counting of calendar days required for a bill to

¹⁰ <https://climatepower.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2023/04/Clean-Energy-Boom-Republican-Districts-.pdf>

¹¹ <https://climatepower.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Energy-Crisis-Snapshot.pdf>

¹² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/10/all-actions>

¹³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/01/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-declares-a-national-emergency-at-the-southern-border/>

¹⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-declares-national-emergency-to-increase-our-competitive-edge-protect-our-sovereignty-and-strengthen-our-national-and-economic-security/>

¹⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/declaring-a-national-energy-emergency/>

gestate before it can be considered by the full House. His tactics, however, only derail House Democrats' ability to force votes on overturning Trump's tariffs on China, Mexico, and Canada¹⁶.

Democrats in the House should immediately introduce resolutions to force Republicans to go on the record blocking votes to terminate Trump's national energy emergency and overturn Trump's tariffs on EU countries and Japan. (Speaker Johnson had also tried to stop Democrats from doing this, but the relevant provision expired on September 30, 2025¹⁷. A similar joint resolution recently passed the Senate with Republican support on October 30th, 2025.¹⁸)

Strategy 2: Divide the Republican Caucus with Discharge Petitions

While the use of joint resolutions to overturn emergency declarations is a great tool to show Americans who is and is not on their side, there is another set of issues and a different tool — the discharge petition — that can pry individual Republicans away from their party. The House continues to have both rogue and vulnerable Republican members, and we should use the discharge petition to divide them from their party and force all Republicans on the record.

The discharge petition is an element of parliamentary procedure that, if supported by an absolute majority of members (218), requires consideration of a piece of legislation by the

¹⁶ <https://rules.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/rules.house.gov/files/documents/rulesreport03102025.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20250407/RulesReport04092025.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/5581377-trump-tariffs-senate-republicans/>

full House. This allows a bill or resolution to bypass normal committee deliberation and bars leadership from blocking a vote. At the time of this writing, there are 214 Democrats sworn into the House of Representatives; to deploy this tactic effectively, Democrats therefore need to find issues that might attract the support of at least (or just) four Republicans.

The power of this tool has been underscored by the discharge petition to release the Epstein files, sponsored by Thomas Massie (R-KY) and Ro Khanna (D-CA) . The push to release the Epstein files and reveal those who participated in his abhorrent conduct is so politically potent that it causes division within the Republican Party. As a result, the petition attracted four Republican signers and reached 218 when Rep. Adelita Grijalva was finally sworn in. It now appears that Republicans will be forced to take a vote on a simple question: what's more important, protecting Donald Trump or holding child sex abusers accountable for their heinous crimes?

For as long as Democrats are in the minority, we should be searching for wedge issues that divide Republicans and file discharge petitions to force votes on the record.

Strategy 3: Throw Sand in the Works With More Frequent Use of the Rules Committee

Process

Trump and his handmaidens in Congress are moving quickly, and speed is part of their strategy. The faster they move, and the faster they are able to jam bills through the legislative process, the less time the American public has to fully digest the consequences.

House Democrats, unlike Senate Democrats, don't have the filibuster as a blocking tool, but they do have a complex set of governing rules that structure the way the chamber operates, and which can be used — far more than is happening right now — to slow down the Republican legislative machine. A key mechanism to do this is through the procedures of the House Rules Committee (Rules).

Rules is a unique but vital step in the House's lawmaking process. The committee is made up of 13 members, overwhelmingly stacked against the minority; the current committee consists of nine Republicans and four Democrats. For a bill to be considered on the floor and passed by a simple majority, it must first make its way through Rules. Rules deliberates on each bill and, most important, reviews and evaluates amendments that are submitted to each piece of legislation.

Both parties can submit an unlimited number of amendments, and each member is entitled to up to five minutes in front of the committee to make their case. If each one of the 213 Democratic members of the House used their full time, that would translate into 1,065 minutes, or 17.8 hours, that Democrats can use to argue against a bill, delaying it from hitting the floor.

This strategy was used during the fight against OB3. Both times that the bill came to Rules, Democrats submitted more than 200 amendments, forcing debate well into the early hours of the morning. They highlighted their opposition to the contents of the bill itself, the rushed manner in which it was being pushed through Congress, and helped sow even more chaos within the Republican Party as the vote drew near.

There is no reason a similar approach shouldn't be used with even the least consequential pieces of legislation, to slow the Republican agenda to a crawl.

Strategy 4: Slow Republicans Down Using the "Magic Minute" Speech Procedure

Another tool that Democrats in the House should use more frequently is the "magic minute." This procedural rule allows the Speaker, the Majority Leader, and Minority Leader to object to a bill on the House floor by claiming time to speak against it. While dubbed the "magic minute," it actually allows for unlimited speaking time, providing Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries with the ability to substantially slow down and delay the legislative process.

Nancy Pelosi used the magic minute in 2018, when Democrats were in the minority in both the House and the Senate under the first Trump presidency, to speak for over eight hours on the House floor in opposition to a Trump directive that ended certain protections for

Dreamers. In 2021, then-Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy beat the Pelosi record for time by close to 20 minutes, in a speech against the Inflation Reduction Act¹⁹.

More recently, Minority Leader Jeffries used his magic minute to deliver a record-breaking eight hour and 45 minute speech on the impact OB3 will have on everyday Americans²⁰. He shared hours of testimony from Americans across the country who were going to lose healthcare coverage, access to food stamps, and more. While the bill eventually passed, it gave Democrats a platform to stall passage while making a case to the American public.

While the magic minute has historically been used rarely and in high-profile moments, it should be used with greater frequency — combined with the Rules Committee process discussed above — to throw sand in the works, slow down the speed with which the Republicans can move their agenda, and draw attention to what they are doing.

Strategy 5: Do Not Provide Any Votes to the Republican Majority

This last one is so simple — and, to me, self-evident — that it's strange to call it a strategy: as long as the Democratic Party is in the minority — and particularly as long as Republicans control the House, Senate, and White House — we should provide no votes that have the effect of allowing the Republican agenda to advance; doing so only confuses the question of who is responsible for the damage and unpopular policies being driven by the Trump Administration.

¹⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/18/politics/build-back-better-house-vote/index.html>

²⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/03/us/politics/hakeem-jeffries-house-speech-magic-minute-trump-bill.html>

Opposition parties play a vital role in functioning democracies: as an intrepid force that shines light on the actions and shortcomings of the party in charge, offers an alternative vision, and uses all of the tools at their disposal to stop or mitigate damage. Successful opposition parties operate in unity.

As Democrats fight the Trump regime, they should be doing absolutely nothing to assist it. Cooperation not only runs counter to the vital policy questions at stake — and misunderstands the nature of the modern-day Republican Party — it muddies the question of accountability and the choice facing voters the next time they go to the ballot box.

It should be said that the Democrats have failed to play this role in critical moments. The decision by Democrats to save Republicans from themselves by providing the votes to end the recent shutdown, without delivering anything in return that could be clearly explained to the American people, is the most recent and high-profile example. Earlier this year, 16 of Trump's nominees for cabinet positions were confirmed with bipartisan support, including Kristi Noem, Pam Bondi, and Michael Waltz — even after his unlawful use of Signal became public²¹. These agents of Trump should not have been given the imprimatur of a single Democratic vote.

An opposition party is only as strong as its weakest link, and voting for these nominees, or bills that cede power to the administration, should be the sole responsibility of the party in

²¹ https://ballotpedia.org/How_senators_voted_on_Trump_Cabinet_nominees_2025

the majority. While these votes took place in the Senate, the same principle applies to the House — and unity in the latter will shore up unity in the former.

Our message should be clear: Trump and the Republicans control every part of the United States government. Any action — or inaction — in Washington is under their full control.

We Democrats stand in firm and united opposition.