

The Trump doctrine: a hostage to Congress?

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TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY has been riddled with controversy, but among a host of newsworthy events, one ubiquitous question remains to be answered: why is Congress not being more active in enacting Trump's agenda?

It's been over a month since House Republicans succeeded in passing their own repeal bill; Senate Republicans rejected that bill but have struggled to formulate their own alternative. Mitch McConnell, Senate majority leader, said on Tuesday that they are "close" to settling on their own plan, as pressure mounts to deliver before the August recess. The mood is at best "cautiously optimistic", as Sen. James E. Risch, Idaho Republican, told reporters. Given that McConnell can only afford to lose three of his fifty two Republicans, this cautious approach is to be expected.

On the equally contentious issue of tax reform, which Republicans admit will not move forward until health care measures are secured, progress is stagnant. During his speech confirming withdrawal from the climate accord, President Trump claimed that his "tax bill is moving along in Congress". This was something of an exaggeration given that the "bill" is in fact a one page outline on tax reform which lacks specifics and next to nothing else is just about scraping through Congress. It's worth highlighting that the last major tax bill was passed under Reagan in 1986, with approval ratings above 60 per cent.

Low approval ratings are undoubtedly a major hindrance to effective action in Congress, with the latest figures suggesting Trump sits at just 36 per cent. In fact, approximately 43 per cent of Americans are in favour of beginning official impeachment proceedings. This is problematic not only in the sense that democratic institutions require public support to claim legitimacy, but also in that ambitious legislation requires the President and Congress to work together. With mid-terms approaching in 2018, congressmen are starting to seek means of demonstrating to voters back home that they are independent, which means defying the party leadership.

Of course, Presidential approval ratings are only part of the problem. With a coherent agenda in front of them, a unified Republican Congress could still pass major legislation. The root of the problem lay in the flaws intrinsic to Trump's proposals, which are largely unpopular with the American public. For one thing, tax reform would categorically involve cuts for the rich and corporations alike. Combine this with substantial budget cuts and a controversial healthcare bill and the barriers to success become all too

clear.

Furthermore, one can hardly blame Congress for policy stagnation given the plethora of distractions currently plaguing Washington; arguably, they have been pre-occupied with checking the personal actions of the President to concern themselves with enacting the agenda.

The Senate Intelligence Committee are currently preparing for the hearing of James Comey. Therefore, while legislative inaction would merit allegations of a broken branch in previous administrations, here it is merely a symptom of a body dealing with the political fall out of a Presidency in crisis.



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