



## Winning! Trump, GOP Congress Are 0-4 On Major Campaign Pledges

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Republicans may now hold the House, the Senate and the White House, but their failure to mobilize early and follow through on long-held campaign pledges has political observers wondering: can a unified GOP government actually govern?

“The biggest thing that hasn’t happened in the first 100 days is that Donald Trump hasn’t developed a relationship with Congress,” Stan Collender, a former top staffer on the House and Senate Budget Committees who worked under both Republican and Democratic administrations, told TPM. “That’s something that should’ve happened during the transition so they could’ve just started off like a house on fire on Inauguration Day, but just hasn’t.”

The cost of that failure to forge a steady working relationship is that, though he declared Tuesday that “no administration has accomplished more in the first 90 days,” Trump will almost certainly complete 100 days in office on April 29 with no notable pieces of legislation to his name.

Members of Congress who had some experience in the governing trenches had tried to temper expectations on some of Trump’s signature promises, with House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) declaring a 200-day window to push campaign pledges through rather than the typical 100 days. But they were similarly optimistic about the prospects for what Ryan called a “big, bold agenda” for the GOP.

Then reality set in. Divisions within the Republican caucus derailed the bill to repeal and replace Obamacare in a mortifying defeat. Hundreds of White House jobs sat unfilled, complicating efforts to produce big-ticket pieces of legislation. To date, the one campaign pledge Trump has unequivocally checked off is the confirmation of a conservative Supreme Court justice, Neil Gorsuch, practically a given with Republicans controlling the executive and legislative branches.

“There is not a lot to show for all of this kinetic political activity other than the fact of the activity itself,” Russell Riley, an expert on the U.S. presidency at the University of Virginia’s non-partisan Miller Center, told TPM.

Over the course of the campaign Republican leaders and Trump in particular heralded an impending sea change in Washington, D.C.: After eight years of obstructionism, they would go on the offensive, vanquishing the Obamacare bogeyman, slashing taxes, and rolling back hundreds of environmental and corporate regulations. Ahead of Trump's 100th day in office, here's a look at how the Republican administration is faring on fulfilling four central campaign promises.

### **A piecemeal approach to rolling back regulation**

The only real progress on rolling back regulations has come through the Congressional Review Act, a previously little-used law that gives Congress 60 legislative days to undo federal regulations. Using only Republican majority votes and Trump's signature, they have undone 11 Obama-era regulations.

Some of these, like the resolution allowing Internet service providers to sell customers' data without permission, garnered public opposition. Few of them actually have touched on the populist issues that helped propel Trump to office. In an early April press call, the White House legislative director all but begged reporters to spill more ink about the newly aggressive use of the CRA.

"This is an important story that has not been told," Marc Short said, as journalists asked if he was trying to paper over the administration's lack of legislative achievements.

Trump's other move on this front was an executive order requiring that two regulations be cut for every new one put forth. One regulatory expert cautioned that while that policy might have a nice ring to it, the President risked stepping on the toes of lawmakers who have worked on regulatory reform for years.

"Congress had put in so much work on the subject, I thought they might have a chance to lead," Kevin Kosar, governance project director at the conservative R Street Institute, told TPM. "But that's not the way it went."

### **A jaw-dropping health care meltdown**

"Repeal and replace Obamacare" was the GOP's seven-year battle cry until the party failed to do either in a high-stakes March effort to pass the American Health Care Act. Stark divides on what that replacement bill should contain cleaved away votes from both moderates and hard-liners, and mixed messages from Trump, who said he was "100 percent" behind the bill while doing little to drum up public support for it, ended up killing the legislation before it was even put up for a vote.

Trump and the GOP have laid out two possible next-step scenarios: Either allow Obamacare to "fail" on its own and blame Democrats, or continue to tinker with the AHCA behind closed doors until all the GOP factions reach an agreement. Experts say both options are politically fraught.

"The fact of the matter now is the Pottery Barn rule: you break it, you buy it," Josh Blackman, a professor at the South Texas College of Law who has written several books on Obamacare, told

TPM. “I don’t think if the bill unravels on President Trump’s watch he can blame it on Obama or the Democrats.”

If they go the other route, moderates who want to keep Medicaid funding intact and preserve coverage for pre-existing conditions will have to reconcile with House Freedom Caucus members who want to see Obamacare ripped up by its roots.

Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, said he never thought those divides could be surmounted in the first 100 days. But he warned that the GOP faces potentially catastrophic political consequences if they can’t achieve repeal with a unified Republican government.

“If Paul Ryan and Donald Trump continue to try not to repeal Obamacare and continue to divide their caucus and break their promises and trigger this internal warfare, then there will be a political price,” Cannon said.

### **Turning to tax reform no easy pivot**

The GOP was banking on repealing nearly \$1 trillion in taxes associated with Obamacare in order to pave the way for the more aggressive tax cuts Ryan has promised to secure. But after the AHCA failed to pass, both Trump and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin have walked back Mnuchin’s pledge that the President will sign a tax bill before the next congressional recess in August.

“I don’t want to put deadlines,” Trump said last week. “Health care is going to happen at some point. Now, if it doesn’t happen fast enough, I’ll start the taxes. But, the tax reform and the tax cuts are better if I can do healthcare first.”

Ken Kies, managing director of Federal Policy Group LLC, a conservative tax lobbying firm, remains optimistic, noting that both congressional Republicans and the President believe in the GOP dogma of cutting taxes to encourage economic growth.

“If you just take the people who seem to have been a problem, the Freedom Caucus guys, they’re much more aligned with Ryan and the sort of mainstream Republicans on taxes than they are on health care,” he told TPM.

Still, Kies said he is “confident” there will be no last-minute progress on the issue by the 100-day mark. That’s because Congress returns from Easter recess with only four legislative days to extend a continuing resolution to fund the federal government.

“As long as that’s all going on, they’d be crazy to release a tax reform draft because it wouldn’t get the press coverage they’d want,” Kies said.

### **An uncertain road ahead for infrastructure**

Trump’s promised \$1 trillion infrastructure bill is one of the few issues on which Democrats have signaled they might be interested in cooperating. Despite the pressing legislative focus on health care and a tax overhaul Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao recently declared that a

comprehensive bill covering transportation, energy, water and “potentially broadband and veterans’ hospitals” would be unveiled by the end of this year.

Still, Kevin DeGood, director of infrastructure policy at the liberal Center for American Progress, doubts that this will be the ticket for an administration “groping around for ways to try to kick-start their agenda.”

DeGood said congressional Republicans can’t really opt to go it alone by simply adding line items for specific infrastructure proposals to an appropriations bill. And GOP politicians hell-bent on reducing the deficit are unlikely to propose costly building projects, he noted, as they spent years railing against the 2009 stimulus bill, that bankrolled such endeavors as “full of waste, fraud and abuse.”

Trump’s reported pledges to tie infrastructure spending to health care or a tax overhaul to pick up Democratic votes are a fundamental miscalculation of the political math, according to DeGood.

“Democrats are not going to go along with taking away 24 million people’s health insurance for a little bit of bridge money, or to engage in the largest upward redistribution of wealth the country has ever seen through a massive tax cut bill in exchange for some bridge money,” DeGood said.