

Trump-McConnell feud threatens agenda

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump can't enact his agenda without Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. McConnell may not have a majority to lead without Trump's help. It's simple, and still so complicated.

The strangest bedfellows in Washington are locked in an increasingly public and personal feud that defies conventional wisdom. The escalating tension between the two men is threatening the GOP's re-election prospects and its ability to govern. It has erupted at a high-stakes moment for the Republican Party, which is facing the prospect of a government shutdown — and the possibility it may fail to enact any major legislation during its first year in complete control of Washington.

The dispute is a reminder of the unconventional politics that have gripped the GOP in the Trump era. While Trump and McConnell ostensibly share the same philosophy, legislative agenda, voters and political opponents, they increasingly act more like adversaries than allies — a reminder of just how divisive the president remains within his own party.

"He's now actively attacking people who can help his agenda," veteran Republican operative Doug Heye said of Trump, who has mobilized his avid supporters against GOP senators since the party's embarrassing failure to overhaul the nation's health care system. "It seems to be really a one-man spiral to the bottom."

Divisions have deepened in recent weeks.

McConnell, like other leading Republicans, is particularly upset by Trump's consistent attacks against vulnerable Republican senators who need his help, according to a person familiar with the Kentucky Republican's thinking who spoke on the condition of anonymity to share private conversations. The person



In this June 6 file photo, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky, listens as President Donald Trump, speaks in the White House in Washington.

"(Trump) is now actively attacking people who can help his agenda."

— Doug Heye, Republican operative

said McConnell questions whether Trump is capable of righting his struggling presidency.

The concerns were exacerbated by Trump's recent description of some participants in a white supremacist rally as "very fine people," remarks that were broadly condemned by Republicans and Democrats.

The intra-party feuding threatens nearly all of Trump's priorities, including his near-daily campaign trail pledge to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border.

While Trump threatened Tuesday to force a federal shutdown unless Congress provides funds for the massive project, many GOP lawmakers, especially moderates, lack his passion for the proposal. They may be harder to win over given the current rancorous atmosphere.

Republicans who feel wounded by Trump also could be less likely to defend him amid numerous investigations into his campaign's ties to Russia. And it could complicate the task of rallying Republicans around complicated tax legislation, where lawmakers can have divergent priorities.

"In politics, it's a mistake

to personalize things, particularly if it's a member of your own team," veteran Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., said Wednesday. "The reality is you're going to need them down the road."

Trump and McConnell "remain united on many shared priorities" and they and other top officials will hold "previously scheduled meetings" after Congress returns from its August recess, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Wednesday in a statement. She said their goals include middle-class tax cuts, building the border wall and strengthening the military.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us, and we are committed to advancing our shared agenda together and anyone who suggests otherwise is clearly not part of the conversation," McConnell said in his own statement.

Such talks are unlikely to yield a close relationship between the two leaders.

At 75 years old, McConnell is just four years older than Trump. But he's spent decades in Washington compared with Trump's seven months. And stylistically and substantively, they are worlds apart.

McConnell, a Kentuckian, is guarded and gentlemanly, while Trump flashes a New Yorker's brash, bombastic impertinence.

McConnell is an unrelenting GOP loyalist who's mastered Senate rules and the legislative process, while Trump regularly bashes Republicans and has limited knowledge of congressional procedure. McConnell often seems to think several steps ahead of others, while Trump bounces from one subject to another with little clear strategic purpose.

The most perplexing of Trump's strategies has been the attacks on sitting Republican senators when his party holds control of the Senate by a narrow margin. Without his support, the GOP stands a chance — if somewhat unlikely — of losing its Senate majority.

Last week, Trump encouraged a former Arizona state senator to challenge Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., in a Republican primary election. Meanwhile, a super PAC allied with Trump launched attack ads against Nevada Sen. Dean Heller, who is facing a primary challenge.

On Tuesday, Trump said his coy refusal to mention Flake's name at an Arizona rally showed "very presidential" restraint. He abandoned the restraint by Wednesday, tweeting that he's "not a fan of" Flake, whom he called "weak on crime & border."

Publicly and privately, Republicans tasked with preserving the GOP's House and Senate majorities next year are outraged.

Some party officials, Heye said, are asking themselves a difficult question: "Is it the Republican president or the Republican Senate I want to protect and work for?"

The divisions are "unprecedented," said Republican pollster Chris Wilson.

Wilson said it would be "catastrophic" if Trump and the Republican-led Congress fail to enact meaningful legislation now that they have total control of Washington.



City workers drape a tarp over the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Emancipation park in Charlottesville, Va., Wednesday.

Charlottesville covers Confederate statues

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Workers in Charlottesville draped giant black covers over two statues of Confederate generals on Wednesday to symbolize the city's mourning for a woman killed while protesting a white nationalist rally.

The work began around 1 p.m. in Emancipation Park, where a towering monument of Gen. Robert E. Lee on horseback stands. Workers gathered around the monument with a large black drape.

Some stood in cherry-pickers and others used ropes and poles to cover the statue as onlookers took photos and video. Some of the crowd cheered as the cover was put in place.

"It's great. It's a good start," said Jamie Dyer, who spoke a short time later from nearby Justice Park, where workers covered a statue of Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. "They do have to go, but it is a start, and I'm glad the city has finally recognized it has to happen on some level."

Later Wednesday, local media reported that a man with a gun strapped to his leg approached the Lee statue and began cutting the tarp with a knife.

Police asked him to stop, and he complied. He addressed reporters

and bystanders, saying he thought it was illegal under state law to cover a war memorial and that doing so amounted to erasing history.

In front of TV cameras, the man started arguing with others at the scene over what should be done with the statues and who was at fault for the violence that unfolded at the Aug. 12 rally.

The decision to shroud the statues came at a city council meeting earlier this week.irate residents packed the meeting, screaming and cursing at councilors over the city's response to the rally. The event, dubbed "Unite the Right," is believed to be the largest gathering of white nationalists in a decade.

Neo-Nazis, KKK members, skinheads and members of various white nationalist factions clashed violently with counter-protesters in the street adjacent to Emancipation Park.

The fighting went on largely uninterrupted by authorities until the event was declared an unlawful assembly and the crowd was forced to disperse. Later, a car rammed into a crowd of demonstrators who were marching through downtown, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring more than two dozen others.

Russian official says U.S. and Russia aren't in new Cold War

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia and the United States aren't in a new Cold War despite spiraling tensions, a senior Russian diplomat said in remarks released Wednesday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov denounced U.S. sanctions against Russia, but emphasized that the current tension "isn't equivalent to confrontation that may spill into open conflict." He added, however, that Russia and the U.S. need to refresh their agreements on preventing incidents at sea and in the air.

Speaking to Japanese and Chinese media in remarks released by his ministry, Ryabkov said: "I don't think that such confrontation is possible." He added that decades of experience have taught Moscow and Washington caution.

"I don't think that we are in a state of a new Cold War because there are no grounds for a Cold War in the old meaning of the word, meaning a confrontation between systems and ideologies, ideological rivalry," Ryabkov said.

Russia-U.S. relations have plunged over post-Cold War lows over the Ukrainian crisis, the war in Syria and the accusations of Russian meddling in last year's U.S. presidential vote.

Ryabkov said that about 400 Russian entities and some 200 Russian citizens have been targeted by the U.S. sanctions. He reaffirmed Moscow's denial of interference in the U.S. election, dismissing the accusations as "collective madness."

He argued that Russia's response to the U.S. sanctions has been "quite restrained and modest," adding that Moscow doesn't view relations with Washington as a zero-sum game.

BRIEFLY

Girl Scouts accuse Boy Scouts of recruiting girls

NEW YORK (AP) — Inflaming a century-old and mostly cordial rivalry, the president of the Girl Scouts of the USA is accusing the Boy Scouts of seeking to covertly recruit girls into their programs while disparaging the Girl

Scouts' operations.

"I formally request that your organization stay focused on serving the 90 percent of American boys not currently participating in Boy Scouts ... and not consider expanding to recruit girls," wrote GSUSA President Kathy Hopinkah Hannan in a letter sent this week to the president of the Boy Scouts of America.

Top leaders of the two youth organizations, both struggling to stem membership declines, conferred this month about possibilities for coordination. But Hopinkah Hannan said she came away from that discussion feeling the Boy Scouts had already committed to an expansion of coed programs that would damage the Girl Scouts.



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