

What if Trump fails?

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Consider a possibility for a moment. I'm not suggesting that Trump's Big Beautiful Bill Act is not going to reach the US statute book, but the possibility that it might not does exist, and is worth thinking about.

This Bill was passed recently by the House of Representatives with a majority of one. The act is now with the Senate, where the Republicans hold 53 of the votes, and the Democrats 47. However, party discipline in the Senate is relatively weak. It is quite common for Senators to vote against their own party, or at least to abstain on key issues.

There are several Senators who have made it very clear that they wish to significantly reform this Bill before it is passed. Most of them are doing so because they dislike the fact that it will dramatically increase levels of US national debt. The fact that Elon Musk has now come out and attacked this Bill, albeit on grounds that I could not endorse, must encourage those, mainly far-right, Republican senators who are standing up against Trump and the compromise Bill that was put together to get this through the House. That fact creates the possibility that Trump will fail to get this Bill through. That is because even if a compromise could be found that passes the Senate, the House then has to approve their amendments, and the likelihood of that appears to be very low indeed.

My question is, what happens if Trump does not succeed in passing his Big Beautiful Bill, which is his way of delivering the very core of his presidential policy?

Trump has tried to rule by decree, but as is becoming increasingly clear, US courts are not backing down from blocking the proposals that he tries to put into law in that way. He might be threatening the US judiciary, including many of those whom he personally appointed, for the temerity of questioning his authority, as he sees it, but that is not stopping them from doing so. As his presidency advances, his opportunities to rule by presidential public proclamation will also reduce, because the presumption is that he should secure legislation instead. But, if he cannot rule in that way, and cannot get this Bill passed, then what happens?

At that point, your guess is as good as mine, but it would appear that at least three alternatives might exist.

Firstly, Trump might declare this to be a national emergency, repeating the narratives promoted almost every day by his press secretary, whose definition of a national emergency is Donald Trump not getting his way because, she claims, the people of the USA gave him the power to do whatever he wanted, and those impeding his progress must be prevented from doing so, whatever the constitution says.

I do not doubt that there will be those who will promote this idea. The difficulty for them will come when they try to persuade the country that Trump must get his way, when it will, in fact, be Republican legislators who will have denied him that opportunity. The incoherence of this position will be hard for them to sustain. The obvious fact that Trump will be standing in opposition to his own political party will be hard for anyone to disguise. The reality that this declaration would then be a personal coup attempt would be apparent to everyone. Could he, in that case, overcome the scale of opposition that would appear to be likely in that case?

Secondly, Trump might have to reform his Bill. It would, however, appear very unlikely that he could get away with further cuts to federal budgets. There are significant numbers of members of both the House and the Senate opposed to such cuts because they fear for their prospects of re-election. That makes it unlikely that Trump could secure sufficient support for them. In that case, the only way in which he could accommodate the right-wing opponents of his bill, who object to the estimated \$2.4 trillion increase in the US national debt that it will give rise to, is by increasing taxes on some of the wealthiest people in the USA.

That could clearly be done, but it is these people who put Trump into office. He risks alienating himself from the group in US society whose appreciation he most craves by doing this, and at a personal level, this would impose a massive strain on Trump. He wants to be seen as the epicentre of the US kleptocracy, and if he fails to deliver what they want, he cannot achieve that status. The impact of that on Trump as a person is hard to predict.

Third, there is the possibility that Trump might crumble. We are now aware that Joe Biden was sufficiently infirm that he became a part-time president towards the end of his term. He was, and is, an old man, and he is in many ways older than his age suggests. But is Trump so very different? He, too, is an old man. I am not convinced that he has dementia, but I do wonder whether he would have the fight to pursue his demands if his Big Beautiful Bill failed, as it might. I would expect a younger person to do so, but even Trump must recognise that he has limited time horizons. Will he continue fighting, or will he instead give up, and permit a change in president, letting JD Vance take over? There has to be a real possibility that this might happen, not that I am suggesting that this might necessarily be a better outcome for the USA, or the world at large.

Instead, what I am suggesting is that we cannot, as yet, presume Trump has reached the point where it can be assumed that his second presidency is going to succeed. It is just possible that his Big Beautiful Bill Act will not be his crowning glory but will instead be his nemesis.

All that we can be sure of is that Trump's capacity to create chaos will continue.