

## Trump's Tariffs Worry GOP Ahead of 2026 Midterms

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WASHINGTON, D.C. Republican lawmakers in several key states are growing increasingly uneasy over the economic impact of former President Donald Trump's latest tariffs on Canadian imports, as concerns mount ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

On Friday, Trump announced a 35% tariff on Canadian goods not aligned with the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (USMCA). The move expanded on existing duties affecting

American imports of Canadian steel, aluminium, automobiles, and copper. While much of North American trade still qualifies under USMCA rules, sectors dealing with the newly targeted items now face sharp price hikes and costs that are already trickling down to American consumers.

The timing of the announcement, coupled with last week's disappointing U.S. jobs report, has intensified fears among Republicans representing vulnerable districts. Several lawmakers have begun to openly question the strategy, while many others are expressing private concern.

Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky was among the few to speak publicly. "It is indicative of a weakened economy," he told reporters, noting feedback from retailers who expect to raise prices heading into autumn. "There's a lag between tariffs and the actual downturn, but it's coming."

Kansas Senator Jerry Moran echoed similar worries. "Tariffs are a tax," he said plainly. "They make goods more expensive for consumers and create uncertainty for business owners. That kind of instability delays hiring and expansion decisions."

Earlier this year, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell also criticised Trump's tariff strategy, warning that punishing allied nations like Canada weakens broader efforts to confront China's trade practices. He, along with Senators Paul, Susan Collins (Maine), and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), backed a spring resolution to undo Trump's earlier 25% tariff initiative. Although that measure passed narrowly in the Senate, it ultimately failed in the House.

Experts warn that the economic consequences of the tariffs will be felt sooner than many lawmakers would like to admit. Inu Manak, a trade policy fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said families may begin noticing price increases during the back-to-school shopping season. "Especially with clothing, we'll see the impact within weeks," she said.

Manak noted a growing number of town hall questions focused on tariffs, replacing earlier concerns over federal agency reshuffles and political appointments. Yet, most Republican lawmakers are staying quiet in Washington.

"Republicans are in a strange position," Manak explained. "They're trying to promote Trump's economic platform, which includes massive tax cuts under the so-called 'Big Beautiful Bill,'

but those tax cuts are supposed to be funded in part by tariff revenue. It's hard to defend both policies when neither is very popular right now."

Polls suggest most Americans, especially Democrats and independents, oppose the tariffs. Still, the political risks of opposing Trump from within the party remain high. Clark Packard, a research fellow at the Cato Institute's trade policy centre, attributes the silence to what he calls "the shadow of Trumpism."

"Most Republicans don't want to get on the wrong side of the former president or his base," Packard said. "They'd rather let the courts intervene."

A ruling may indeed be on the horizon. Last week, the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington heard arguments challenging Trump's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose tariffs. A decision could come as soon as this month. Some GOP insiders hope the judiciary will offer a way out of the political corner.

"They're hoping the courts strike it down so they don't have to vote against it," said a source close to U.S.-Canada trade talks, who requested anonymity.

For now, voters may be the final arbiters. If inflation continues to rise, as some indicators suggest it might, and job growth remains sluggish, Republicans could face consequences at the polls.

Currently, Republicans control the Senate with 53 seats and hold a slim majority in the House with 219. But with 22 Senate seats in play and several competitive House districts, the margins could shift. Many of the seats up for grabs are in states that Trump won in 2024, but polling indicates growing dissatisfaction.

"If things don't improve," Manak said, "voters may punish the incumbents, regardless of party affiliation. It happened during Trump's first term after China retaliated. There's precedent."

Packard added that unless Trump secures a new trade deal, ideally with tariff rates under 15%, the political fallout could be severe. "The policy is unpopular, the president is unpopular, and Republicans risk becoming increasingly unpopular by extension," he warned.