Jeffries Breaks Record in Hourslong Speech Opposing Trump's Policy Bill

Representative Hakeem Jeffries, the New York Democrat and minority leader, delayed a final House vote with an impassioned speech that lasted nearly nine hours.

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Michael Gold reported from Capitol Hill.

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Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the Democratic leader, on Thursday broke the record for longest House floor speech, in an eight-hour, 45-minute talkathon opposing Republicans' signature legislation carrying out President Trump's domestic agenda.

Beginning his remarks before dawn, Mr. Jeffries said that he was "planning to take my sweet time" with his speech. Shortly before 1:30 p.m., he broke the record set in 2021 by Representative Kevin McCarthy of California, who spoke for more than eight hours to delay a vote on a $2 trillion Democratic bill to strengthen the social safety net and fight climate change.

Thursday's speech was not a filibuster, the Senate tactic that allows a member to speechify for unlimited time, delaying action indefinitely. But Mr. Jeffries was making use of his prerogative as a leader to stretch his allotted 60 seconds of speaking time for far longer, in a House tradition known as a "magic minute." In doing so, he was attempting to seize a pivotal moment for Democrats — who have toiled to find a cohesive strategy, message and messenger for countering Mr. Trump — to make a forceful case against the president and his agenda.

The speech was the final Democratic delay standing in the way of passing the G.O.P. bill to extend tax cuts and slash social safety net programs, which Mr. Trump has said he wants to sign by July 4.

But it was, in the end, a portrait of ineffectiveness. Because it was clear throughout that the often soaring oratory was only postponing a bracing reality: Republicans were poised to pass the bill and achieve their latest in a string of victories over Democrats, whose standing with voters has never been lower under the leadership of Mr. Jeffries and his counterparts.

Mocking the name Republicans have bestowed on the bill — the One Big Beautiful Bill Act — Mr. Jeffries said, "Republicans are trying to jam this one, big, ugly bill down the throats of the American people," and urged lawmakers to vote against it. The speech mainly focused on the ramifications of spending cuts to social safety programs, laying out stories of vulnerable Americans who might be hurt by its reductions to Medicaid and SNAP food assistance.

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"Leadership requires courage, conviction, compassion — and yet what we have seen from this administration and co-conspirators on the Republican side of the aisle is cruelty, chaos and corruption," he said, adding that the bill was "an extraordinary assault on the health care of the American people."

Mr. Jeffries, who spoke deliberately and frequently referred to a large binder of notes, addressed a mostly empty House chamber, though some Democratic colleagues clustered behind him and applauded at key points in a show of encouragement.

His speech drew heavily on the traditions of the Black church, with a deliberate cadence that echoed the rhythm of a Sunday sermon and borrowed from Scripture. The responses from his colleagues, including shouts of "Take your time!" and "Tell them, Mr. Leader!," reinforced his role not just as a political figure but as a messenger speaking to something that Democrats see as a higher cause.

It was a sharp rebuke that, for many Black Americans, served as a reminder that politics and faith have always been intertwined tools in the struggle for justice, dignity and accountability.

As the hours ticked by, Mr. Jeffries touched on myriad topics beyond the legislation being debated, including the cuts to government programs exacted by Mr. Trump's Department of Government Efficiency, his immigration crackdown, and even the Declaration of Independence — whose principles he charged the president with violating. There were also moments of levity. Mr. Jeffries recalled saving his first paycheck as a teenager to buy new sneakers so he could "look fresh, like Run D.M.C.," took a moment to tell his mother he loved her and playfully called out colleagues by name as he referred to their states and alma maters.

Speaker Mike Johnson was likely to address the chamber once Mr. Jeffries finished. He also has unlimited time, in theory, but he told reporters earlier on Thursday that he expected his speech would be significantly shorter than that of the Democratic leader. A vote on the bill was expected soon after Mr. Johnson's remarks conclude.

Robert Jimison contributed reporting.

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