

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET November 09, 2021 | TTR not mapped yet | Christopher T. Murray

Four Corners

A term that refers to either the congressional leadership from both parties or committee leadership from both parties.

Let's Get in Four-Mation

In Congress, legislation has a few different paths to becoming a law. One or more members of Congress can champion a policy that moves through the legislative process in the traditional way (i.e., regular order). With large bills, negotiations often begin or conclude among the “four corners.” The four corners can refer to one of two groups: the House Speaker, House Minority Leader, Senate Majority Leader, and Senate Minority Leader; or the House and Senate chairs and ranking members of a certain committee or subcommittee. For example, the term could be used to describe Senate Appropriations Chair Leahy (D-VT) and Ranking Member Shelby (R-AL) along with House Appropriations Chair DeLauro (D-CT) and Ranking Member Granger (R-TX).

Trickle-Down Negotiations

Negotiations among the four corners can be particularly important when negotiating and managing must-pass legislation, such as appropriations bills or the National Defense Authorization Act. In 2017, discussions among the leadership four corners [kickstarted](#) negotiations on appropriations after an immigration stalemate led to a three-day government shutdown. A similar scenario happened in 2019 when Democrats [clashed](#) with former President Trump about budget allocations for non-defense spending. Negotiations like this often begin (or end) with the leadership four corners, potentially with input from the four corners of committees of jurisdiction.

A House Divided

In less polarized times, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework, which cleared Congress last Friday with a final vote in the House, may have moved forward with the support of the leadership four corners. House Minority Leader McCarthy (R-CA) did not support the bill and even said he would whip votes against it, despite the fact that the bill passed the Senate with a wide bipartisan margin and even received the vote of Senate Minority Leader McConnell (R-KY).

The next time we may see cooperation among the four corners could be during regular appropriations, and discussions among the committee four corners have been under way for some time. With government funding set to run out in early December, the appropriations four corners will need to determine if they will be able to finish all twelve appropriations bills in time or if they will use another continuing resolution as a temporary fix for some or all of the bills.

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