

## Trump ramps up push for Nebraska to change electoral vote allocation

Nebraska is one of two states that awards some of its electoral votes by congressional district. A vote from the Omaha area is part of Harris's easiest path to victory.

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Former president [Donald Trump](#) spoke by phone this week with a Nebraska state senator as part of a last-minute push to change how the state allocates its electoral votes and block the easiest path Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) has to win the White House.

State Sen. Merv Riepe (R) said he spoke briefly by phone with Trump on Wednesday in the presence of Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen (R) during a visit by Sen. [Lindsey Graham](#) (R-S.C.), who encouraged Republicans in the state's unicameral legislature to change to a statewide winner-take-all electoral vote system.

"I want the law changed. I've made no qualms about it," said Graham, an ally of Trump, who said he traveled to Nebraska at the request of Sen. [Pete Ricketts](#) (R-Neb.), the former governor. "They were open-minded. I said: 'Listen, it's your decision to make. It comes down to one electoral vote. I want you to understand what that one vote would mean.'"

Nebraska is one of two states that award some of its electoral votes by congressional district, which has given Democrats a [good shot at winning a single vote from the Omaha area](#), despite the overwhelming statewide Republican lean. With that vote, Harris can secure the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House, as long as she also wins her three strongest battleground states — Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

The change is supported by Trump, Pillen, all of the state's U.S. senators and congressmen, and a majority of the unicameral

legislature, according to people involved in the process. But Republicans have not yet been able to convince a supermajority of the legislature — all 33 Republican state senators — which would be needed to override a filibuster to pass the change before the November election. Trump previously pushed for a legislative change in April and was [rebuffed by lawmakers](#).

Graham met Wednesday with Pillen and around two dozen state senators about the proposal, Graham and Riepe said. Before the hour-long luncheon, Riepe said he met with Graham and Pillen and spoke with Trump by phone for a minute or so.

Trump stressed the importance of making the change and “wasn’t threatening in any way at all,” Riepe said Friday in an interview. “Primarily I think he was saying: ‘Look, this is important to me. I’m interested, and I want you to know that I’m not just taking anybody for granted,’” Riepe said.

Pillen’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Three people involved in the process, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal deliberations, said they think there are multiple holdouts to the change, which would probably face a political backlash in Omaha, where voters have embraced their outsized role in the presidential election and the financial benefits of presidential advertising and campaign visits that come with it.

“The people of the 2nd district are excited to get out to vote, and they are offended by the prospect of the governor and senators and out-of-state interests taking away the opportunity to have their voice be heard,” state Sen. John Cavanaugh (D) said. “Any politician who takes away their vote to have their voice be heard will feel the repercussions at the ballot box.”

One key holdout vote is state Sen. Mike McDonnell, a former Democrat who joined the Republican Party in the spring after he was censured by Democrats for his [anti-abortion](#) views. He has repeatedly said he opposes a winner-take-all system, but his office has suggested that he has not ruled out changing his mind.

“I’m not supporting winner-take-all,” he [said in April](#) when he changed parties. This week, his spokesman Barry Rubin [told the Nebraska Examiner](#): “Senator McDonnell has heard compelling arguments from both sides. ... And, as of today, (he) is still a no.”

McDonnell, a former firefighter who has deep ties to organized labor in the state, is widely considered a possible candidate for mayor in Omaha next year. He attended the larger meeting with Pillen and Graham on Wednesday but has not spoken with Trump, said a person familiar with the events who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal conversations.

The Harris campaign declined to comment. The Trump campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A change to how Nebraska gives out its electoral votes could cause a 269-269 tie in the electoral college, if Harris won only the three battleground states along the Great Lakes — Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania — and not other key swing states. If there were a tie, the House of Representatives would choose the next president, with each state’s congressional delegation getting one vote. All House seats are up for election in November, but most observers expect Republicans will have an edge if that vote happens.

Maine is the only other state that awards its electoral votes by congressional district, and Trump won one of the state’s four electoral votes in 2020.

Democrats who control the Maine legislature have said they would change to a winner-takes-all system if Nebraska did, but there probably is not time to make the change in Maine for this election. To have the measure take effect before the electors meet Dec. 17, lawmakers would need to pass it by a two-thirds margin, and Democrats do not have that many votes.

In the interview, Riepe said he believed every state should award its electoral votes by congressional district, as Nebraska has since 1992. But since there is no movement to do that, he said he backs having Nebraska adopt a winner-take-all policy. He said he told the governor

he supports the change and, at Pillen's request, signed a document pledging to vote for it.

Riepe drew national attention last year when he cast a crucial vote to block a six-week abortion ban. He later helped pass a 12-week ban. Riepe said he was probably called into Wednesday's small meeting because of his voting history.

He said he was skeptical supporters could get the last votes they would need to make the change, saying McDonnell reiterated his opposition to it during Wednesday's luncheon.

"McDonnell stood up at the luncheon and said — he was very straightforward — and he said, 'I'm a no vote,'" Riepe said.

If Nebraska Republicans collect the votes they need, lawmakers will need about a week to change their system, Riepe said.

Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen (R) believes the state could finalize the change as late as the day before Election Day, but others believe they have less time, Evnen spokeswoman Jackie Ourada said. Evnen had no comment on the possible change, she said.

The state sent ballots to military and overseas voters on Friday. Mail ballots to other voters will be sent starting Sept. 30.

Graham said he talked to the Nebraska lawmakers about the importance of changing their system to ensure Trump gets as many electoral votes as possible because national security is of paramount concern. He described the state lawmakers as open minded.

"It's not just about Nebraska," Graham said. "It's international consequences."