Democrats taunt Trump with President Musk moniker

by Alex Gangitano and Mike Lillis

Democrats are taunting President-elect Trump with claims that billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk is calling the shots instead of the incoming president.

And with Musk set to play a major role in Trump's second term — both as co-chair of the "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) and a close presidential ally — it remains to be seen if the moniker of "President Musk" will cause a rift between the famously mercurial incoming president and the richest man in the world.

Lawmakers began the effort after Musk helped kill a bipartisan spending agreement that had taken months to work out.

Rep. Ami Bera (D-Calif.) noted that Musk launched the public opposition campaign long before Trump issued his own statement critical of the deal, suggesting Musk compelled the president-elect to intervene, even if he had no previous designs to do so.

"Elon Musk dives in, and I think forces Trump to dive in," Bera said.

That power dynamic, Bera added, could spell trouble in the future, as two of the most powerful figures in the world — while aligned for the moment — might be headed for a messy divorce if or when their interests and egos collide.

“What we learned from former President Trump is that he doesn’t want to share the spotlight with anyone, so what does that look like?” Bera asked.

Musk was tasked with leading DOGE in order to find ways to make government more efficient and to cut waste. But his role appears to be growing as he involves himself in government funding fights, joins key meetings with Trump and shares his opinion on top issues, as he did in calling for “some basic cognitive test for elected officials” after the news broke that Rep. Kay Granger (R-Texas) has had health challenges that kept her away from the Capitol for months.

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), who served as the second-ranking Democrat for two decades, is among the lawmakers who’s now referring to the billionaire entrepreneur as “President Musk.”

“We had an agreement that was jointly reached,” Hoyer said during the chaotic stalemate last week, “and that monkey wrench was put in there by 50 or 100 tweets by Musk that turned the Republicans around.”

Trump and Musk have had a close relationship since before the election and appear to still be on good terms, despite the power dynamic that has led some to claim the tech tycoon is in charge.

Political watchers have wondered when the relationship between the two big personalities will go sour, and even some Republicans assume a rift is inevitable, especially with Musk working closely with the Trump team as he takes on DOGE.

“I assume at some point there’ll be a rift because history tells us … most people do not last a long time in Trump’s world. Maybe Musk will people defy that, but history tells us that that’s not the case,” GOP strategist Doug Heye said.

Heye called the Democrats’ efforts to get under Trump’s skin by labeling Musk president “just trolling” and argued it’s “not always effective.”

A Trump spokesperson fired back at Democrats, saying the party “just lost the House, Senate, and presidency because their abysmal policy proposals failed Americans for the past four years.”

“Democrats have nothing but ad-hominem attacks because they lost everything,” Trump-Vance transition spokesperson Anna Kelly added.

Among Democrats who are propping up Musk with the faux title of president, there seem to be different motivations.

Some said they think it simply reflects the reality of who’s truly in charge, and they’re hoping to shine a bright light on the extraordinary fact that an unelected figure has assumed so much power over public policy.

“The fact speaks for itself: The one that first disrupted the bill was Musk, and the one that helped pay for the presidency was Musk, and the one that has been in front of Trump — and that’s hard to do — has been Musk,” Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.) said. “So it’s clear to me that there’s some kind of coalition between the two of them on what is the best way to run the country.”

Meeks suggested Trump would be easier to work with without Musk’s intervention in policy debates. “That probably would be helpful,” he said.

Still, there's also a sense that the Democrats' "President Musk" campaign is part of a political strategy designed to drive a wedge between the billionaire, who plays by his own rules, and the incoming president, who demands loyalty and doesn't have much tolerance for challenges to his authority.

Most might not be saying it out loud, but some lawmakers suggested that was at least part of the objective.

Asked if Democrats were trying to incite that clash, Bera was coy.

"We would never do anything like that," he quipped.

Democrats piled on the Musk taunts in the midst of the impasse over government funding, which was solved just before the deadline on Friday. Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.) argued Musk "pulled the rug out from underneath" Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), and Rep. Lois Frankel (D-Fla.) argued that Musk "is calling the shots."

Former Rep. Joe Crowley (D-N.Y.), who called Musk Trump's "second vice president," called the degree of influence the South African-born billionaire has as an unelected official "unprecedented."

"I'd be hard-pressed to find someone who has had initial foreign origin, who has had as much influence on the outcome of a government," he said. "We'll see what happens. There's no question that he's involved, and he will continue to be, until the president decides he has had enough."