Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont announced Monday he will run for reelection this year, squelching speculation that the 82-year-old progressive icon might retire at a time when the Democratic Party is anxious about the advancing age of its top leaders.

Hailing from a Democratic stronghold, Sanders' decision virtually guarantees that he will return to Washington for a fourth Senate term. And his announcement comes at a critical moment for Democrats as the party navigates a growing divide over Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

Sanders has criticized President Joe Biden's handling of the U.S. relationship with Israel even as he's hailed much of Biden's domestic agenda ahead of what could be a tough reelection fight for Biden against presumptive GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump.

Sanders said he wants the war in Gaza ended immediately, massive humanitarian aid to follow and no more money sent to Israeli Prime Minister [*Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://apnews.com/hub/benjamin-netanyahu).

"We are living in a complicated and difficult political moment," Sanders told The Associated Press on Monday. “I very strongly disagree with Biden in terms of the war in Gaza.”

At home, he said, the presidential election is between Biden and Trump, “and Donald Trump is in my view the most dangerous president, has been the most dangerous president in American history.”

With the prospect of Trump's possible return to the White House, Sanders framed his bid to return to the Senate as being driven by concerns about the future of democracy in the U.S. In an announcement video, he said that in many ways the 2024 election “is the most consequential election in our lifetimes.”

“Will the United States continue to even function as a democracy, or will we move to an authoritarian form of government?” he said. He questioned whether the country will reverse what he called “the unprecedented level of income and wealth inequality” and if it can create a government that works for all, and not continue with a political system dominated by wealthy campaign contributors.

Known for his liberal ***politics*** and crusty demeanor, Sanders has been famously consistent over his 40 years in ***politics***, championing better health care paid for by the government, higher taxes for the wealthy, less military intervention and major solutions for climate change. He has also spent his career trying to hold corporate executives to account, something that he’s had more power to do as chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

Sanders is an independent. He was a Democratic congressman for 16 years and still caucuses with the Democrats.

He sought the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016 and 2020. He said [*a year ago*](https://apnews.com/article/bernie-sanders-biden-endorsement-2024-d8f0772b117e2bf83e1062708ea651c0) that he would forgo [*another presidential bid*](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-ap-top-news-elections-joe-biden-virus-outbreak-efa604abc5e03dd714c164611fdcfb52) and endorse Biden’s reelection this year.

“I have been, and will be if re-elected, in a strong position to provide the kind of help that Vermonters need in these difficult times,” [*Sanders said*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRMICNBXp2Q) in a review of his positions as chairman of the important Senate panel and a member of the chamber's Democratic leadership team, as well as a senior member of various other committees.