

# [***Utah Republicans to select nominee for Mitt Romney's open US Senate seat***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWH-WHF1-DYMD-6247-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

SALT LAKE CITY — Nearly a dozen Utah Republicans vying to replace [*Mitt Romney*](https://apnews.com/hub/mitt-romney) in the U.S. Senate are set to square off Saturday for the party nomination in a race expected to reveal the brand of political conservatism that most appeals to modern voters in the state.

Romney has long been the face of the party's more moderate wing, but his [*retirement from the Senate*](https://apnews.com/politics/massachusetts-utah-general-news-e80ae66f9572ddcdcc63a666913be886) opens a door for Utah's farther-right faction. Observers are closely watching whether voters select a successor whose ***politics*** align more with Romney's or with Utah’s other U.S. senator, conservative [*Mike Lee*](https://apnews.com/hub/mike-lee), who supports former President [*Donald Trump*](https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump).

The winner at Saturday’s state GOP convention, which tends to favor far-right candidates who appeal to the most zealous party members, may get a bump in the race. Some losing candidates still can qualify for the June 25 primary ballot by gathering signatures, so Republican voters will ultimately decide the party's pick to succeed Romney.

“Ultimately, the successful candidate in the primary election phase will be the candidate who shows they best connect with general Utah Republican values, rather than the person who's able to stake out the furthest right position possible, even if that helps them to some extent with the delegates," said Damon Cann, head of Utah State University's political science department.

The crowded race, which includes a congressman, a former state legislative leader and the lawyer son of a former senator, will not only set the tone for the post-Romney era of Utah conservatism, but likely will serve as a litmus test for Trump's popularity in the Beehive State.

Those most closely aligned with the embattled former president, namely former state House Speaker [*Brad Wilson*](https://apnews.com/article/romney-utah-senate-wilson-announcement-3de3116312752951925b9f5d878371b4), are expected to fare well at the convention. But political scientists, including James Curry of the University of Utah, anticipate a more moderate candidate such as [*U.S. Rep. John Curtis*](https://apnews.com/united-states-house-of-representatives-house-elections-general-news-f79fbd70273d48ed92b90ebe5bf33631) will prevail in the primary. The 63-year-old Republican congressman, environmentalist and former mayor of Provo began his political career as a county-level Democratic Party official.

“This is a type of state where I think you actually have a slight advantage being more anti-Trump, if not decisively and vocally so, which is not something you’d find in most states where Republican voters are concerned," Curry said.

While Trump has made inroads in the state party, he has [*long been unpopular*](https://apnews.com/ap-exclusive-most-mormons-back-gop-but-fewer-support-trump-dfa9f5a8c265432c998ebaddf2603102) among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church, who make up about half of the state’s 3.4 million residents.

Curtis has actively tried to distance himself from Trump, and even Romney, promising to forge his own path in the Senate. However, his record of pushing fellow congressional Republicans to [*combat climate change*](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-business-climate-climate-change-e1f0f572a7b5841bb6141456776bafec) — in much the same way Romney urged party members to part ways with Trump — has led many to draw parallels between the two.

Even Wilson, 55, who endorsed Trump earlier this year, has made little mention of the former president on the campaign trail. The move represents a departure from many farther-right candidates in other states who have tried to leverage Trump's political power to win their own races.

Curry expects the party nomination will carry little weight in a state where Republican delegates are often not representative of the party's broader membership. Romney himself was booed by delegates at a past convention and even [*lost the nomination in 2018*](https://apnews.com/article/43e4e6d0fd2d4b9593c66642f11e7980), but he still won the statewide popular vote.

The candidates notably have not sought Romney’s endorsement, which Cann said is unusual in races with a departing incumbent. Several have sought the support of his more conservative counterpart, who is popular among delegates, but Lee has not yet endorsed anyone in the Senate race.

Curtis, Wilson and businessman Jason Walton already have guaranteed their spots on the primary ballot through signature gathering. Other candidates such as [*Brent Orrin Hatch*](https://apnews.com/article/mitt-romney-senate-race-curtis-hatch-78c2f78361d4989271bc5337eb230ffd), son of Utah’s longest serving U.S. senator, the late Orrin Hatch, could still make the primary if they earn at least 40% of delegate votes on Saturday.

Wilson has raised about $2 million from supporters, and he loaned his campaign an additional $2.8 million, according to Federal Election Commission fillings. Curtis has raised about $3 million, which includes money left over from his former congressional bid.

Republican nominees for governor, Congress and other offices also will be selected at Saturday's convention. Incumbent [*Gov. Spencer Cox*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-governors-republican-democrat-bcc015900f6dc8a103e56fd65fc13558) faces some prominent challengers, but Cann and Curry expect the moderate Republican will win the primary even if he isn't chosen as the party nominee. State Democrats will hold a concurrent convention on Saturday.

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