

# [***McConnell, back in Kentucky, talks about life in the Senate after leaving longtime leadership post***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BRS-N9Y1-JC5B-G3TB-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

SHELBYVILLE, Ky. — For nearly two decades, Mitch McConnell's only job uncertainty hinged on whether he'd serve as Senate majority or minority leader after the next election. With his days as [*Republican leader now numbered*](https://apnews.com/article/mitch-mcconnell-senate-republican-leader-stepping-down-ba478d570a4561aa7baf91a204d7e366), the Kentuckian is talking more freely about his priorities once he's no longer calling the shots for his party.

During events last week back in the Bluegrass State, McConnell offered fresh details about his decision to step down in November from his role as the [*longest-serving Senate leader*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-montana-united-states-senate-new-york-city-mitch-mcconnell-41f4326218e7c2d8439ca02d09c6683b) in history, which set off [*a wave of speculation*](https://apnews.com/article/kentucky-mitch-mcconnell-b7e181e7155e75165399a94c4d5f19c3) about the future of his seat. The 82-year-old McConnell still hasn't said for sure whether he might seek another term, leaving others to fill in the gaps, but in a radio interview and a speech, he did grow more expansive about what he hopes to accomplish in the more than two and a half years remaining of his current term.

After months when his public visits back home seemed to taper off amid concerns about his health — though McConnell has meetings and events in Kentucky that aren't publicized to the media — the senator kept the focus on policies he hopes to help move forward in Congress.

“I felt it’s time to shift to a new mission," he said during a speech in Shelbyville. "And I’m certainly not leaving the Senate and still have a lot of interest in the issues that are before us.”

Topping his to-do list: fighting back against what he sees as his party's increasing shift toward an isolationist foreign policy, McConnell said. He's been on the same mission as GOP Senate leader but it’s a politically difficult stance as conservatives become increasingly opposed to spending on overseas wars amid the fiery, often isolationist populism of former President Donald Trump.

“I have a great passion for trying to help do everything I can to push back against the notion that somehow this is not in America’s interest to be the leader of the democratic world,” the senator said during his speech. “Things don’t work well if we are not in the leadership position.”

McConnell has steadfastly supported a muscular U.S. foreign policy during his Senate career. Nowhere would a hands-off approach pushed by some in his party be more risky than in Ukraine, he said. Backing off support for Ukraine in its war with Russia would embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin's expansionist ambitions and ultimately could trigger a wider conflict, McConnell said.

“If the Russians take Ukraine, some NATO country will be next and then we will be right in the middle of it,” McConnell said last week during an interview on WHAS-AM radio in Louisville.

McConnell parried questions about his health and political future. He said he will serve out his [*seventh Senate term*](https://apnews.com/article/mitch-mcconnell-amy-mcgrath-kentucky-42e37704f0635b9c82bdd9f690bd0c95), adding: “I don’t know how many times I can say that. But that’s exactly what I’m going to do.” He offered no hints whether he will run for reelection in 2026, but McConnell had continued raising campaign funds for himself.

Asked in Shelbyville how he's doing, McConnell replied curtly: “I’m great. How are you?”

He had a concussion from a fall last year and two public episodes where his [*face briefly froze*](https://apnews.com/article/senate-gop-leader-mcconnell-health-freeze-up-c5b43745251daa0bb63636ceff4edce2) while he was speaking. Aides said McConnell’s decision to give up his leadership post was unrelated to his health.

When the topic turned to Kentucky losing clout once he's no longer in leadership, the ever-restrained McConnell replied: “Well I think I’m still going to have a pretty big voice.” McConnell's reputation as a prodigious campaign fundraiser for his party also will keep him influential in Republican ***politics***.

Throughout his career, McConnell has been a prolific appropriator for the Bluegrass State, a role he's well positioned to continue as a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

"I think in a state like ours, what we can get out of the federal government we need to get,” McConnell told reporters in Shelbyville.

McConnell also sits on the Senate Agriculture Committee and again will have a big hand in crafting the next federal farm bill — crucial to Kentucky's diversified farm sector.

The speech included zingers aimed at Democratic President Joe Biden, whose policies he blamed for fueling inflation and overreaching through regulations.

As usual, the senator made no direct mention of Trump. The two have been estranged since December 2020, when McConnell refused to abide by Trump’s lie that Biden's election as president was the product of fraud. McConnell broke the ice long enough last month to [*endorse Trump*](https://apnews.com/article/mitch-mcconnell-endorsement-donald-trump-super-tuesday-422a2ec6f19917b46804b4cf6ee40371), the presumptive Republican presidential nominee in the November election.

McConnell talked expansively in his speech about the dangers of isolationism, suggesting that more is at stake for U.S. interests than at anytime since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

“You can say ‘well, I’ll just keep my head down and maybe everything will be OK,’” the senator said. “Or you can stand up to it. It may not be fashionable now, but I’m a Ronald Reagan Republican — peace through strength.”

He punched back against resistance to sending more aid to Ukraine. It helps employ American workers to replenish U.S. military stocks, McConnell said, and halting the aid would send a dangerous signal to other U.S. adversaries.

“This war is not taking a single American life," he said. "We’re not involved directly in the war. We’re trying to help these brave people stand up for their own independence.”

In another public appearance last week, McConnell introduced U.S. Sen. Katie Britt when the Alabama Republican spoke at the University of Louisville — McConnell's alma mater.

McConnell has become more reflective on his long Senate career when speaking to Kentucky audiences. And he's poked fun at his own elder stateman status.

“I often tell people my real break in ***politics*** was my internship with Henry Clay,” he said, referring to the 19th century Kentuckian.

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