

# [***South Dakota Sen. John Thune jumps into race to succeed McConnell as Senate leader***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGB-26V1-JC5B-G1H2-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

WASHINGTON — South Dakota Sen. [*John Thune*](https://apnews.com/hub/john-thune) is entering the race to be the next Republican leader of the U.S. Senate once Sen. Mitch McConnell steps away from the post in November.

Thune, currently the No. 2 Senate Republican, told local news outlets that he is interested in the job. He said in an interview with South Dakota's Keloland News that “I hope to be” the next leader and will do everything he can to convince his colleagues to support him.

He told another local news outlet, Dakota News Now, that McConnell stepping down is “a chance for a reset and I’d like to be a part of it.”

His announcement sets up an expected race with Texas Sen. [*John Cornyn*](https://apnews.com/hub/john-cornyn), who held the No. 2 leadership post until he was term-limited five years ago. The two men have long hinted at their interest in replacing McConnell, but they have made their campaigns official in light of [*McConnell’s announcement last week*](https://apnews.com/article/mitch-mcconnell-senate-republican-leader-stepping-down-ba478d570a4561aa7baf91a204d7e366) that he would not seek reelection as GOP leader when his term ends in November.

Other senators could jump into the race as well, including Wyoming Sen. [*John Barrasso*](https://apnews.com/hub/john-barrasso), who is currently No. 3 in leadership behind McConnell and Thune.

Republican senators haven’t chosen a new leader since 2007, when McConnell was elected — before most current GOP senators took office. Much of the campaigning will likely take place in private and in one-on-one meetings, as the contenders work to convince each of their GOP colleagues to back them on a secret ballot. The election will take place in a closed-door conference meeting at some point after the November elections.

Thune has at times sparred with former President Donald Trump, the current front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination. In the days before the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, Thune told reporters that Trump’s efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat would “go down like a shot dog” in the Senate.

Since then, Trump declined to endorse Thune’s reelection bid in 2022 and Thune endorsed South Carolina Sen. [*Tim Scott*](https://apnews.com/article/tim-scott-trump-vice-president-south-carolina-30fef13f5690cd9b2a9f6db33c2a9eae) over Trump in the presidential primary. But after Scott dropped out and it has become more likely that Trump will be the party's nominee this year, Thune has said he would back the former president.

Thune told Dakota News Now that Trump “has taken some swipes” but “I just think in the end, I worked with him well when he was president before.”

The four-term senator mulled retirement in 2022 but ultimately decided to come back to the Senate as it became clear he had a chance to become leader.

Like Cornyn, Thune said he would work to make sure individual senators have more of a voice in decisions. That has been a frequent complaint from rank-and-file members under McConnell, particularly as massive year-end spending bills that are introduced by leadership and quickly passed through both chambers have become more common.

Announcing his intention to run on Friday, Cornyn said he believes “the Senate is broken — that is not news to anyone.”

It is so far unclear who will have an advantage in the race. Thune could have the advantage of incumbency as McConnell’s current deputy. But Barrasso has tracked furthest to the right of the three, becoming the first of them to endorse former President Donald Trump for the GOP presidential nomination.

Cornyn has drawn attention for his fundraising, having raised a total of $13 million for incumbents, the party’s Senate campaign arm and Senate Republican nominees already in the 2024 cycle.

But Thune has amassed a campaign war chest of $17.8 million — a sum that he is also likely to use as campaign contributions to fellow Republicans as he mounts the bid for leader.

While McConnell still enjoys support from the majority of his caucus, he announced his plan to step aside last week after facing [*louder and increasing criticism*](https://apnews.com/article/mcconnell-ukraine-republicans-senate-c5217d686c85837d2b9708aa197843f9) from some within his party who have said it is time for a change in leadership.

McConnell was also at odds with Trump, whom he has said was “ [*practically and morally responsible*](https://apnews.com/article/mitch-mcconnell-donald-trump-impeachment-c9a38d7492feea56821f4e0930914b61) ” for the Capitol attack. The two haven’t spoken since before then, and Trump frequently bashes him publicly.

“Believe me, I know the ***politics*** within my party at this particular moment in time,” McConnell said in a floor speech last week. “I have many faults, misunderstanding ***politics*** is not one of them.”

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Associated Press writer Stephen Groves contributed to this report.

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