

# [***Opinion: Good on Lisa Murkowski for having a backbone***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BN1-63R1-DY7V-G046-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski is so done with former President Donald Trump that she may leave the Republican Party. Good for her for having a backbone. Other principled Republicans should follow suit, instead of either getting in line behind him or slinking away in shame.

Murkowski [*told CNN*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/24/politics/lisa-murkowski-done-with-trump/index.html) that she "absolutely" would not vote for Trump in the 2024 election. "I wish that as Republicans, we had ... a nominee that I could get behind," but she can't bring herself to back Trump. She added, "I just regret that our party is seemingly becoming a party of Donald Trump."

Does that mean she's leaving the party and becoming an independent? "I am navigating my way through some very interesting political times," she replied. "Let's just leave it at that."

[*Murkowski*](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/11/mary-peltola-alaska-house-democrats.html) comes from a fiercely independent-minded state where ***politics*** lean right, but don't map on to the religiosity and [*authoritarianism*](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/authoritarianism-in-the-american-south-robert-l-dipboye/1144500031) that have long [*characterized*](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2956.html)[*conservativism*](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/confederacy-wasnt-what-you-think/613309/) in the GOP stronghold of the Bible Belt. She has her Senate seat because of that strong sense of independence: In her 2010 race, she lost the Republican primary to a more conservative candidate, only to be the second Senate candidate ever to win the general election in a [*write-in campaign.*](https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6AG51C/)

The particulars of her state give Murkowski a bit more space to assert a political vision that even a few years ago wouldn't have been so out of step with her party, but now makes her a rarity in Republican ***politics***: a politician who is solidly conservative, but believes in the utter necessity of American democracy, asserts politicians should behave decently and recognizes that sometimes her team isn't going to win - and that that's an essential reality of a democratic system, not a barrier to ultimate power that must be torn down.

Murkowski hasn't exactly been fearless, waiting until the very last minute to endorse [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/24/politics/lisa-murkowski-done-with-trump/index.html) in the former South Carolina governor's Republican primary campaign against Trump. (Haley, whose campaign limped as she lost every Republican primary except for Washington, DC, and Vermont, dropped out of the race just a few days after Murkowski's endorsement.) But Murkowski has still done more than many members of her party to reject Trump's most extreme excesses - including [*voting*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/19/politics/alaska-senate-race-2022-lisa-murkowski-donald-trump/index.html) to impeach him over his role in the January 6 attack on the US Capitol.

This refusal to bow to Trump has Murkowski on the [*outs*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/16/lisa-murkowski-censured-alaska-republicans) with the [*GOP*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/19/politics/alaska-senate-race-2022-lisa-murkowski-donald-trump/index.html), a party almost entirely under the rule of a single charismatic leader. Despite losing the last election, Trump has maintained a vast and loyal base who have awarded him the party's nomination for a third time. Once content with a party apparatus that simply did his bidding, he has now fully taken over the Republican National Committee, with his daughter-in-law installed as its [*co-chair*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/politics/trump-endorse-michael-whatley-lara-trump-rnc/index.html?ref=upstract.com), those perceived as not sufficiently loyal [*purged*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/11/new-rnc-leadership-trump-loyals-purge-staff) and some of the money it has raised for Republican campaigns treated as a personal [*Trump piggybank*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/21/us/politics/trump-legal-bills-rnc.html), funneled toward mitigating [*his many legal troubles*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/21/politics/save-america-pac-rnc-trump-donations/index.html) (and the related financial ones).

Murkowski has had enough and is saying as much - as she should. Few other Republicans are as forthright.

Trump's party has become profoundly dysfunctional, with internecine battles raging and the congressional GOP struggling to get much of anything done. Trumpism has also become so virulent that Republicans who do not do the former president's bidding, or are targeted by him or his allies, routinely face a barrage of abuse, including death threats. Some, including Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, have had to hire [*private security*](https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/06/members-of-congress-are-spending-more-than-ever-on-security/).

Many Republicans in Congress have seemingly decided that the hate and dysfunction is just not worth it, and are quietly [*quitting*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/politics/republicans-retiring-house/index.html). Several have [*said*](https://www.vox.com/2023/12/8/23993478/congress-departures-ken-buck-polarization-dysfunction) they are fed up with the ridiculous do-nothingness, but many have simply slunk off, saying they are declining to seek reelection because they want [*to spend more time*](https://www.vox.com/2023/12/8/23993478/congress-departures-ken-buck-polarization-dysfunction) with their [*families*](https://twitter.com/DebbieLesko/status/1714393835550220689) or offering some [*other*](https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/ken-buck-resignation-congress-colorado-representative-4th-congressional-district) exhausted-sounding excuse. A few, to their credit, have been not-so-quiet: Republican Rep. Victoria Spartz of Indiana [*said*](https://newrepublic.com/article/176346/lesko-romney-congress-quitters-jordan) in a statement that she was close to resigning because, she wrote, "I will not continue to sacrifice my children for this circus with a complete absence of leadership, vision and spine."

Overwhelmingly, though, Republicans who want to stay in office have pledged their loyalty to Trump, with many compromising their long-stated values in the process. The few who have publicly dissented have mostly been pushed out, including Romney and former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney.

Murkowski is one of the only Republican senators left who is willing to publicly criticize Trump and say unequivocally that she won't vote for him. She may be in an easier position than many in her party, believing she has the voters in her state behind her. That's something few other Republicans can count on. Perhaps Murkowski can more easily stand on her principles because she doesn't believe that doing so will cost her her job.

But even if she is in a more flexible position than Republicans elected from the most pro-Trump states, Murkowski deserves kudos for standing up against the man her party has elevated to near-king status. Republican voters have made very clear that Trump is their guy, and there is no reward for those who challenge him - a lesson just handed down very [*publicly to Haley*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2024/01/21/exp-trump-new-hampshire-alayna-treene-012104aseg1-cnni-us-politics.cnn).

Now, Murkowski has a decision to make: Will she continue to be a loyal servant a party that is, as she put it, the "party of Donald Trump"? Or will she decide that enough is enough, and declaring herself an independent is both more honorable and more honest? This may be a path she walks largely alone. But other Republicans with a conscience are no doubt watching. Hopefully they take some notes on how to grow a spine.

Opinion by Jill Filipovic

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