

# [***These lawmakers sound fed up too***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BMT-K8H1-DY7V-G03R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; There was an interesting and telling exchange recently between Sen. Lisa Murkowski, the Alaska Republican, and CNN's Manu Raju.

In the hallway exchange, [*Murkowski expressed frustration*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/24/politics/lisa-murkowski-done-with-trump/index.html) that former President Donald Trump is her party's presidential nominee.

"I wish that as Republicans, we had ... a nominee that I could get behind," she told Raju. "I certainly can't get behind Donald Trump."

'Very interesting political times'

Murkowski was one of the handful of Republicans who voted to convict Trump on impeachment charges after the January 6, 2021, insurrection. Trump recently has taken up the cause of [*publicly defending people convicted for storming the Capitol*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/16/politics/biden-trump-january-6/index.html), calling them "hostages" and "political prisoners."

When Raju pushed Murkowski about whether she might leave the Republican Party, she said this: "I am navigating my way through some very interesting political times. Let's just leave it at that."

The next generation of the GOP

Now compare Murkowski's frustration with Republicans with the comments of Cleveland businessman [*Bernie Moreno*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/24/politics/moreno-wont-say-if-trump-lost-the-2020-election-or-if-it-was-stolen/index.html), the Trump-endorsed candidate for the Senate seat in Ohio.

Moreno won the Republican nomination in last week's primary and he did so by aligning himself with Trump. Moreno's campaign released a digital ad during the primary, for instance, in which he agreed with Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen.

These days Moreno wants to talk about other things.

"Oh my gosh, are we talking about that?" he told reporters on Capitol Hill who asked questions about the 2020 election. "We've had like three elections since then," he said. (Actually, the only election since January 6, 2021, was the 2022 midterm.) Trump has modeled his 2024 presidential campaign as a moment of "retribution" for his 2020 loss.

If the future of the GOP is candidates like Moreno, then Murkowski, who no longer feels completely comfortable as a Republican, is the past.

A unique survivor

Murkowski has always been on the more moderate end of the political spectrum, and her brand of ***politics*** makes her unique. She lost a Republican primary during the pre-Trump tea party wave of 2010 but won reelection as a write-in candidate, the most difficult feat in ***politics***.

More recently, Murkowski may have benefited from Alaska's nonpartisan, ranked-choice voting primary system when she won reelection in 2022, fending off a challenge from a Republican endorsed by Trump. Republicans in Alaska are hoping to [*claw back the ranked-choice voting system*](https://alaskapublic.org/2024/02/27/anti-ranked-choice-voting-initiative-clears-first-hurdle-on-way-to-november-ballot/) with a ballot initiative in November.

No one really considers Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican and Senate minority leader, a moderate - but when he announced last month that he would [*step down as GOP leader*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/28/politics/mitch-mcconnell-stepping-down-leadership-senate-gop/index.html) in November, he did it with an acknowledgment that the party has moved away from him (and, although he didn't say it, toward Trump). McConnell is a frequent target of Trump's frustrations.

While Murkowski's clear frustration with her own party is very much a product of the Trumpism that now dominates the GOP, it's also in line with the frustration of moderate Democrats.

Democratic moderates not running

Sens. [*Kyrsten Sinema*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/05/politics/kyrsten-sinema-announces-retirement/index.html) of Arizona and [*Joe Manchin*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/09/politics/joe-manchin-wont-run-for-reelection/index.html) of West Virginia, the two most notable moderates elected as Democrats and who emphasized the need to work across party lines, are both leaving the Senate rather than run in difficult reelection campaigns.

Sinema left the Democratic Party in late 2022, although she still caucuses with Democrats. Manchin has promised to travel the country after he leaves the Senate and try to work on "creating a movement to mobilize the middle, and bring Americans together."

Another moderate, [*Sen. Jon Tester*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/22/politics/jon-tester-reelection/index.html), the Montana Democrat, is less strident in his criticism of the national party, but he will have to find a way to convince voters in his red state to send him back to the Senate if Democrats are to have any hope of maintaining control of the body. The same goes for [*Sen. Sherrod Brown*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/19/politics/ohio-senate-election-moreno-trump/index.html), who has his own brand of Democratic, union-friendly populism and will square off against Moreno in November.

An exodus of dealmakers

I asked Raju for his thoughts on Murkowski's comments and the departure of Sinema and Manchin. He sent me this email about the exodus of moderates from the Senate, which has actually been underway for years:

**RAJU:** This has been a trend in the Senate over the last several election cycles: The dealmakers in the body are leaving. And that has huge implications for a chamber where 60 votes are needed to advance legislation.

Sens. Kyrsten Sinema, Joe Manchin and Mitt Romney - three senators who have been central to some of the most significant deals under President Joe Biden - all opted not to run for reelection.

But before this Congress, the chamber lost other members who were prone to cut deals: Sens. Rob Portman, Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker are among them.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who is part of the vanishing middle in the Senate, just won reelection in 2022 - so she has several years left in her term.

Some say the disappearing bloc of centrists is a good thing and argue that the deals that the senators cut are bad for the country.

At least that's what Mitch McConnell's critics say after he blessed a bipartisan border security deal and pushed through a $95 billion aid package, both of which have been slammed by his right flank and are stalled in the more partisan House.

But what will the Senate look like next year, with McConnell stepping aside as leader? Will those retiring members be replaced by more partisan senators? And will the Senate start looking more like the House?

Not just the Senate

There's an exodus in the House too, although it is among conservatives frustrated by lack of action. To pass legislation, Republicans will only be able to lose one vote when [*Rep. Mike Gallagher*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/22/politics/mike-gallagher-republican-retiring/index.html), the young Wisconsin lawmaker who had been seen as a rising star in the party, resigns early. He broke with most Republicans over the impeachment of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Gallagher follows [*Rep. Ken Buck*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/12/politics/ken-buck-leaving-congress-early/index.html), the hardline Colorado Republican who resigned early in frustration over Republican election denialism and because House lawmakers are unable to set aside differences to get much done.

"This place has just devolved into this bickering and nonsense and not really doing the job for the American people," he told CNN's Dana Bash earlier in March, explaining why he'd be resigning early.

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