

# [***Your grandfather's GOP is just about completely gone***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF8-3S91-DY7V-G0FF-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 28, 2024 Wednesday 8:11 PM GMT

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**Length:** 756 words

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**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Sen. Mitch McConnell knows where the Republican Party is headed, and he also knows it's not a place where he should be a leader.

" Believe me, I know the ***politics*** within my party at this particular moment in time," McConnell said on the Senate floor on Wednesday, [*announcing he will step aside as party leader after the election in November*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/28/politics/mitch-mcconnell-stepping-down-leadership-senate-gop/index.html). "I have many faults - misunderstanding ***politics*** is not one of them."

He understands, therefore, that isolationism and nationalism, driven by former President Donald Trump, is quickly becoming Republican orthodoxy. It's not something McConnell agrees with.

"I'm unconflicted about the good within our country and the irreplaceable role we play as the leader of the free world," he said in the speech.

McConnell's Senate term does not end until January 2027,and he plans to serve it out - just not as the top Republican in the Senate. He could, for instance, take over the powerful appropriations committee.

But his decision to leave his top leadership post has been the subject of speculation for some time in Washington as frustration with McConnell's old-school views clashed with MAGA-aligned newcomers.

Markers of the party's rapid evolution are everywhere in recent years

Trump's disregard for Sen. John McCain, before McCain's death. The isolation Sen. Mitt Romney felt in the chamber after voting to impeach Trump. It's almost hard to remember that McCain and Romney were the party's presidential candidates in the two elections before Trump took over.

While McConnell manipulated Trump's term to achieve his priorities - notably, packing the federal court system and the Supreme Court with conservative jurists - he is also an old-school institutionalist who reveres the Senate and the Constitution.

The discord in McConnell's actions between protecting those institutions and protecting the GOP will mark his legacy. He blamed Trump for inspiring the January 6, 2021, insurrection, but unlike Romney, he did not vote to convict Trump in a second impeachment trial.

Separately, McConnell revolutionized the exploitation of Senate rules, notably the [*filibuster*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/politics/filibuster-senate-explained/), to make the Senate a more tribal place than it was when he was first elected in the 1980s.

Trump's 'America first' or Reagan's 'shining city on a hill'

It is on national security that McConnell clearly feels he is in a different place than the Trump-led party.

"America's global leadership is essential to preserving the shining city on a hill that Ronald Reagan discussed," McConnell said in his speech. "As long as I'm drawing breath on this Earth, I will defend American exceptionalism."

His longtime former aide, Scott Jennings, now a CNN contributor, said on CNN after the midday speech that McConnell was "acknowledging what a lot of Americans are feeling about their government right now."

Arguing that McConnell was "heir to the traditional Reagan mantle of the Republican Party," Jennings acknowledged, "I know that is not in vogue right now."

To Jennings, McConnell is the current leader of "the Reagan view of what the United States of America is supposed to be as a global superpower."

"I know how seriously he takes it," Jennings said.

Recent work across party lines

While for most of McConnell's career he infuriated Democrats across the aisle, CNN's chief congressional correspondent Manu Raju said McConnell more recently has crossed a younger generation of fellow Republicans.

"In this post-Trump era, and particularly in this Congress, he has worked with Democrats," Raju told CNN's Dana Bash. "That has infuriated Republicans."

CNN's Ronald Brownstein noted that the current divide in Congress is over whether, as McConnell and President Joe Biden desperately hope, the US again provides military aid to Ukraine. Most Republicans elected in recent elections oppose expenditures and do not prioritize helping maintain democracies abroad.

"The trend in the Republican Party is in a Trumpian direction," Brownstein said.

McConnell's view of government is going to be on the way out if Trump wins in November.

"The idea that there would be the adults in the room who are institutionalists, who are resisting many of the more extreme things that (Trump) wants to do - whether it's withdrawing from NATO or minimizing our participation or a massive, militarized door-to-door deportation force - is going to be a lot less powerful in a second Trump term," Brownstein said.

Analysis by Zachary B. Wolf, CNN

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**Load-Date:** February 28, 2024

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