

# [***Mitch McConnell to step down from GOP leadership position in the Senate***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF7-P5W1-JBSS-S4TK-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell will step down as GOP leader in November, the Kentucky Republican announced on the Senate floor Wednesday, marking the end of an era on Capitol Hill and setting up a high-stakes race for his successor.

He will continue to serve in the US Senate but will allow "the next generation of leadership" to take the helm of the Senate Republican Conference.

McConnell, who turned 82 last week, said, "the end of my contributions are closer than I prefer."

McConnell has long been a towering figure in Washington, DC, and has made history over the course of his political tenure. In 2023, McConnell became the longest-serving Senate party leader in history.

However, in recent months, McConnell has found in himself at odds with members of his conference particularly over the issue of additional US funding for the war in Ukraine. And McConnell has a strained relationship with the Republican Party's front-runner for the presidential nomination: Donald Trump. [*CNN reported in January,*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/28/politics/trump-republican-senate-leadership/index.html) the two hadn't spoken in more than three years.

"As I have been thinking about when I would deliver some news to the Senate, I always imagined a moment when I had total clarity and peace about the sunset of my work," McConnell said in his floor remarks. "A moment when I am certain I have helped preserve the ideals I so strongly believe. That day arrived today."

He received a standing ovation at the end of his remarks, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, approached him afterwards to shake his hand. He was followed by many of his colleagues from both sides of the aisle, receiving a hug from Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

McConnell's record in the Trump era

McConnell has long been a highly influential figure in Republican ***politics*** and has played a leading role in securing major victories for his party during the time he has served as leader.

While serving as Senate majority leader during former President Donald Trump's time in office, McConnell helped guide three Trump-nominated Supreme Court justices to confirmation - Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett - as well as the confirmations of a vast number of conservative judges to the federal bench, transforming the federal judiciary in the process.

Notably, however, there have been significant moments where McConnell has been at odds with Trump, who is now the GOP front-runner in the race for the White House, setting up a clash between the two powerful Republicans.

After a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021, seeking to overturn Joe Biden's presidential win, McConnell blamed Trump for provoking the attack, but still voted to acquit him of inciting an insurrection after the House moved to impeach.

The typically tight-lipped Senate Republican leader rarely broke from Trump in his four years as president. But he led the Senate's certification of the presidential election that the rioters pledged to overturn, and strongly condemned the violence at the Capitol.

McConnell's health has been in the headlines over the past year

McConnell has suffered a string of high-profile health incidents over the past year.

In March, he was treated for a concussion after a fall at a hotel in Washington, DC.

Several months later, McConnell experienced episodes where he briefly appeared to freeze up on two separate occasions while speaking with reporters, incidents that sparked questions and concern over the Kentucky Republican's health and fitness to lead the Senate Republican conference.

McConnell on Wednesday said his decision to step down came following the death of his wife Elaine Chao's youngest sister, Angela, in a traffic accident earlier this month.

"As some of you may know, this has been a particularly difficult time for my family. We tragically lost Elaine's younger sister, Angela, just a few weeks ago. When you lose a loved one, particularly at a young age, there's a certain introspection that accompanies the grieving process. Perhaps it is God's way of reminding you of your own life's journey to reprioritize the impact of the world that we will all inevitably leave behind," he said.

He thanked his wife of 31 years, calling her the "love of my life" and that "I'm eternally grateful to have her by my side."

He finished his speech by assuring his critics that he was prepared to be a thorn in their side for the rest of his time as leader.

"I still have enough gas in my tank to thoroughly disappoint my critics, and I intend to do so with all the enthusiasm with which they've become accustomed," he said.

Race for new Senate GOP leader already under way

The three Senate Republicans who are most closely-watched as potential successors are known on Capitol Hill as the "three Johns" - South Dakota Sen. John Thune, Texas Sen. John Cornyn and Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso.

Sen. Mitt Romney told CNN's Kaitlan Collins on "The Source" that the three "Johns" are the "leading candidates right now," and that he doesn't believe Republican senators will solely base their choice for the party's next leader on who Trump, the front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, endorses.

"People jokingly say, 'I'm for John,' and I think they're pretty safe in saying that," the Utah Republican said, adding that he was "surprised" McConnell made his announcement Wednesday.

"That election is nine months away, and there is a much more important election between now and then," Barrasso told reporters Wednesday. "And that's the election that we need to take the presidency, and the Senate, and the House and that's where my focus is right now."

Thune, who serves as Senate minority whip, wouldn't say if he is running for leader following the announcement by McConnell.

Thune said he wasn't going to make any announcement as he walked into a Senate GOP lunch. Asked if he would announce his decision before November, Thune said: "I'll get back to you."

Cornyn earlier repeatedly also sidestepped questions about whether he would run for leader.

"I think Mitch has been one of a kind in terms of his leadership in the Senate," he told CNN as he departed the floor after listening to McConnell's speech.

GOP Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, a vocal critic of McConnell, would not say if he plans to run for Republican leader. Scott challenged McConnell at the end of last Congress for the role.

"I'm focused on my reelection," he told CNN. Scott's Senate term ends this year.

This story has been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Manu Raju, Dana Bash, Kristin Wilson and Jack Forrest contributed to this report.

By Clare Foran, Morgan Rimmer and Ted Barrett, CNN

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