

# [***'Weaponized His Leadership': Insurgent Senate GOP Forms Post-McConnell Plan***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BNJ-G011-JBFB-H00K-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/GETTY-IMAGES-credits-John-Cornyn-image-by-Anna-Moneymaker-John-Thune-image-by-Kevin-Deitsch-Mitch-McConnell-by-Chip-Somodevilla-scaled-e1711566658180.jpg)

A number of Senate Republicans are fed up with the way their leader, Mitch McConnell, handled his job, and they have confidence his potential replacements will bring change.

The Daily Caller interviewed numerous Senate Republicans and allies who say there is a general consensus that the closed-off, McConnell-operated leadership style is a thing of the past. They say a majority of the Senate GOP believes it is time they all start working together.

McConnell announced in late February that he will be stepping down as Senate Republican leader in November. The Kentuckian said he will serve out his term, which ends in January of 2027, “albeit from a different seat in the chamber.” His announcement came after facing [*growing criticism*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/20/republican-senate-mitch-mcconnell-border-deal-ukraine-aid-funding-vote-mike-lee-ron-johnson-rick-scott/) in recent months after working with the pro-Ukraine wing of the GOP to try to pass more aid for the country without getting border security concessions from Democrats.

Since McConnell's [*announcement*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/28/mitch-mcconnell-stepping-down-senate-republican-leader/), Texas Sen. John Cornyn and South Dakota Sen. John Thune have said they will be running to become the next Senate GOP Leader. Florida Republican Sen. Rick Scott, who challenged McConnell for the leadership position in 2020, is also considering a run for the job.

Wisconsin Republican Sen. Ron Johnson told the Caller the anti-establishment wing of the party hasn't settled on a candidate, but talks are ongoing: “No, we've had discussions, but I'll leave it at that. We were having discussions before leader McConnell announced his intention there. I mean, I think I was surprised. I wasn't expecting that. But, again, I appreciate the fact that he did give us that heads up. So we have this time.”

“From my standpoint, I'll sing the praises of Rick Scott. He's shown leadership. It was his tenacity that continued to schedule meetings with House members, week after week after week, really got us by the debt ceiling impasse. I'm not sure he gets enough credit for that,” Johnson continued. “It was Rick Scott who just week after week, even though we're making no progress, continued to hold those meetings and had the leadership skill to track House members. And that was the final result. So he's done that.”

Both Thune and Cornyn have voting records that resemble McConnell's. They have voted for most continuing resolutions and omnibus bills with McConnell, however they voted against controversial spending bills such as the inflation reduction act, and the small business COVID relief act of 2022 during the last Congress.

The pair also voted for the supplemental legislation that contained Ukraine funding during this Congress, and haven't been shy about voting for massive appropriations bills. A majority of the bills they voted against were almost completely along party lines. The three also voted in favor of the 2024 NDAA, which extended FISA powers until April. All three have also been consistent supporters of providing additional aid to Ukraine.

Johnson said that the new leader needs to get on the same page as the rest of the conference.

“Most successful organizations in the private sector have business statements, they have mission statements. They establish principles that guide how they operate. They establish goals. People in those organizations understand the role they're going to play, in accomplishing those goals? I mean, that's not how you can describe Congress or the Republican Conference right now. That concept is so foreign to him (McConnell),” Johnson said. “Again, I think Rick Scott would be an excellent leader. But again, I'm not voicing support one way or the other for one particular candidate over another. I want to go through this process.” [***(RELATED: Mitch McConnell Will Step Down As Senate Republican Leader In November)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/28/mitch-mcconnell-stepping-down-senate-republican-leader/)

“There's been way too much power vested in the leader. And so it has to be a far more open and collaborative process. And quite honestly, that came out loud and clear through a number of members in our conference meeting. I think that's just table stakes. The next leader is not going to have the type of power that leader McConnell had. The next leader is going to have to inform the conference what directions they want to take, and they're going to have to obtain the consensus of the conference and not make these decisions for us.”

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Photo-by-Anna-MoneymakerGetty-Images-98-e1711579829963.jpg)

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) speaks during a news conference on the U.S. Southern Border at the U.S. Capitol on February 06, 2024 in Washington, DC. Senate Republicans held the news conference to discuss their lack of support for the bipartisan Senate immigration legislation released over the weekend. (Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

Rachel Bovard, the Vice President of Programs at the Conservative Partnership Institute (CPI), told the Caller that it's likely to be a two-man race between Cornyn and Thune.

“You know, I think it's possible that another candidate emerges, but I think, with Barrasso, sort of committing to run for whip, that was the only other viable challenger in terms of the lane that Cornyn and Thune are in. So I think at this stage, I'm pretty confident there's a horse race between those two,” she said. “I think there's just got to be a huge paradigm shift in how the leader deals with the conference. You know, the McConnell era has been, the hallmark has been, extremely top down, tightly controlled mechanics of how the conference will work.” [***(RELATED: EXCLUSIVE: GOP Civil War Deepens As Senators Claim McConnell Threw Party's Voters 'Under The Bus' On Ukraine, Border)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/20/republican-senate-mitch-mcconnell-border-deal-ukraine-aid-funding-vote-mike-lee-ron-johnson-rick-scott/)

She added that a new leader will need to foster a more cooperative atmosphere in the conference.

“There's got to be this, like team atmosphere that really just does not exist right now. McConnell is an incredibly divisive leader and is completely fine pitting members against each other in his own conference. And that's got to stop. I think that he has weaponized his leadership position against individual members. And you see this not just on the official side. You see it on the campaign side, right?,” she went on. “Like Senate Leadership Fund. They'll say, 'oh, well, we fund conservatives.' But yeah, it's after they have no other choice. Like they fund JD Vance after JD Vance wins the primary and he's like the horse right. They weaponize political spending.”

“He kicked Rick Scott and Mike Lee off of Commerce said, oh, that's your third A. Boom. You're gone. And he denied Eric Schmitt his first choice in the Committee of Judiciary, for voting against him, essentially, which is insane because Eric Schmitt is a former attorney general,” Bovard continued.

“And I also think you have people, John Cornyn in particular, who has a huge fundraising operation already. So he has an established skill set in that regard,” she added.

A source familiar told the Caller that McConnell has weaponized the leadership platform on both the inside and outside of the chamber, mentioning the Senate Leadership Fund and the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC).

“We want to de-weaponize the platform, the leadership platform. The leadership platform has been weaponized, on the inside and outside. The outside political side of it has been weaponized. But the Senate Leadership Fund and to a degree, the NRSC, over which, leader McConnell has wielded a significant amount of influence, some would say quite improperly,” the source familiar said.

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Photo-by-Nathan-HowardGetty-Images-6-e1711579922401.jpg)

Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) speaks with members of the media on March 22, 2024 in Washington, DC. The House of Representatives passed a $1.2 trillion spending bill to fund the government through September and avert a partial shutdown. The legislation will now go to the Senate for consideration. (Photo by Nathan Howard/Getty Images)

Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee told the Caller that the next leader will need to involve more members in policy discussions and not make decisions without approval of the conference.

“There are a lot of people within the conference who want there to be, who want the leader position to be focused primarily on developing floor strategy and defending the interests of the conference as a whole and the floor, and that the leadership structure perhaps needs to be flattened a bit and made less top heavy,” Lee said.

“I think a lot of those questions are going to focus on what plans anyone aspiring to be the new leader might have, might want to bring to the conference ... including, how to involve more members of the conference and involve the conference in its entirety. In certain key strategic decisions,” Lee continued. [***(RELATED: EXCLUSIVE: 'This Is Our Opportunity' - Top GOP Senators Game McConnell's Ouster After Botched Border Deal)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/07/senate-border-bill-mitch-mcconnell-rick-scott-jd-vance-ted-cruz-mike-lee/)

“Some have also suggested term limits for all the leadership positions. I think that they come up as well. I know John Cornyn has embraced that publicly,” Lee added.

Republican Indiana Sen. Mike Braun also praised Scott, saying he wants to see him run against Cornyn and Thune to be Leader. Braun also mentioned that Wyoming Republican Sen. John Barrasso, who announced he is running for Senate GOP Whip, would have been a solid choice for Leader.

“Number one, I'd like to see a guy like Rick Scott jump into the race again. He knows that. And I think he'll be, maybe considering it. I don't know much more than that, but to me, I think he'd be ideal,” Braun said.

“John Barrasso, I think would have probably been, one that would have been clearly different from the other two. He's got a pretty good conservative voting record. He is one that I think would align with the new guard that's starting to populate the Republican caucus,” he continued.

“We need to be involved in the issues of the day, not just playing defense. That's what I'd do. If I were the leader and if I had any interest in being there, more than two terms, I would have tried to pursue it. But there'll be many others like me and a Rick Scott that are going to start staffing the Senate. That's when you'll get your next dynamic majority leader,” Braun added.

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Photo-by-Kevin-DietschGetty-Images-31-e1711580067130.jpg)

Sen. Mike Braun (R-IN) attends a press conference on government funding during a press conference at the U.S. Capitol on March 06, 2024 in Washington, DC. (Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

Duncan Braid, the coalition director for American Compass, told the Caller that he believes Republicans have a lot to learn from McConnell's leadership, mentioning the border deal. Before McConnell announced he would be stepping down as Leader, several prominent Republican senators [*expressed*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/07/senate-border-bill-mitch-mcconnell-rick-scott-jd-vance-ted-cruz-mike-lee/) that the border bill debacle could push the GOP conference over the edge to remove McConnell from leadership in exclusive conversations with the Caller.

“I think the better consultation, of the sort of the other, frankly robust factions in the Senate, is something that is key. I mean, think about the immigration bill. It was sort of, negotiated behind closed doors and then, later they trotted it out and had no buy-in from anyone in the conference and then they immediately had to abandon it. I think it was what like less than 24 hours before everyone had to jump ship on that. So better consultation, trying to actually bring people in, and address the other members in the conference,” Braid said.

“Nobody was asking for an immigration bill, certainly not the one that McConnell masterminded and that apparently his staff basically wrote, according to Senator Murphy. So the conference was in the right position on the border. Unfortunately, the conference was completely ignored by leader McConnell,” Sen. Johnson told the Caller. “That can't happen in the future. I don't think the conference is going to let that happen again.” [***(RELATED: EXCLUSIVE: Senate Republicans Sound Off On Leaked Border Deal Proposals, Say They Will Absolutely Not Vote For Them)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/01/24/senate-republican-josh-hawley-mike-lee-ted-cruz-border-deal-leak-proposal/)

“I think, Thune and Cornyn are both pretty conventional choices and it kind of remains to be seen how that will end up working out. But I would say that we just need somebody who can actually lead the Senate Republican conference,” Braid continued.

“As far as McConnell 2.0, his leadership in the 118th has been a disaster, right? I mean, the immigration bill for one and then they split the conference over the Ukraine supplemental. You just need somebody who can sort of try and bring the two sides together here. Whether that's Thune or Cornyn, I think it's kind of an open question,” he added.

McConnell is the longest-serving party leader of all time in the Senate and has been serving in the Senate since 1984. [*According to*](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/other/FavorabilityRatingsPoliticalLeaders.html) Real Clear ***Politics***, McConnell is rated Americans' most disliked political leader with favorability ratings that are worse than President Joe Biden's.

Now, for the first time in nearly two decades, Republicans will need to pick a new leader to follow into battle.

**Graphic**

John Thune and John Cornyn peak from behind a curtain at Mitch McConnell. (Rodger Roundy/Daily Caller) (GETTY IMAGES credits: John Cornyn image by Anna Moneymaker John Thune image by Kevin Deitsch Mitch McConnell by Chip Somodevilla)

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