

Members of Congress Head for the Exits, Many Citing Dysfunction

More than three dozen incumbents have announced they will not seek re-election next year. Some are running for other offices, while others intend to leave Congress altogether.

By Kayla Guo
New York Times

Eleven are running for the Senate. Five for state or local office. One for president of the United States. Another is resigning to become a university president. And more and more say they are hanging up their hats in public office altogether.

More than three dozen members of Congress have announced they will not seek re-election next year, some to pursue other offices and many others simply to get out of Washington. Twelve have announced their plans just this month.

The [wave of lawmakers](#) across chambers and parties announcing they intend to leave Congress comes at a time of breathtaking dysfunction on Capitol Hill, primarily instigated by House Republicans. The House G.O.P. majority spent the past few months deposing its leader, waging a weekslong internal war to select a new speaker and struggling to keep federal funding flowing. Right-wing members have rejected any spending legislation that could become law and [railed against their new leader for turning to Democrats](#), as his predecessor did, to avert a government shutdown.

The chaos has Republicans increasingly [worried that they could lose their slim House majority next year](#), a concern that typically prompts a rash of retirements from the party in control. But it is not only G.O.P. lawmakers who are opting to leave; Democrats, too, are rushing for the exits, with retirements across parties this year outpacing those of the past three election cycles.

And while most of the departures announced so far do not involve competitive seats, given the slim margins of control in both chambers, the handful that provide pickup opportunities for Republicans or Democrats could help determine who controls Congress come 2025.

“I like the work, but the politics just no longer made it worth it,” Representative Earl Blumenauer, Democrat of Oregon, said in an interview. He announced his retirement last month after more than a quarter-century in the House.

“I think I can have more impact on a number of things I care about if I’m not going to be bogged down for re-election,” Mr. Blumenauer said.

As lawmakers consider their futures in Congress, they are weighing the personal sacrifice required to be away from loved ones for much of the year against the potential to legislate and advance their political and policy agendas. In this chaotic and bitter environment, many are deciding the trade-off is unappealing.

This session, said Representative Dan Kildee, Democrat of Michigan, has been the “most unsatisfying period in my time in Congress because of the absolute chaos and the lack of any serious commitment to effective governance.”

Mr. Kildee, who has served in Congress for a decade, said he decided not to seek re-election after recovering from a cancerous tumor he had removed earlier this year. It made him re-evaluate the time he was willing to spend in Washington, away from his family in Michigan.

The dysfunction in the House majority only made the calculation easier.

“That has contributed to the sense of frustration,” he said, “and this feeling that the sacrifice we’re all making in order to be in Washington, to be witness to this chaos, is pretty difficult to make.”

Representative Anna G. Eshoo, Democrat of California, also announced she would end her three-decade career in Congress at the close of her current term. One of her closest friends in Congress, Representative Zoe Lofgren, another California Democrat, [told her hometown news site, San Jose Spotlight](#), that there was speculation that Ms. Eshoo was leaving “because the majority we have now is nuts — and they are.” But Ms. Lofgren added that “that’s not the reason; she felt it was her time to do this.”

Some House Republicans have reached the limits of their frustration with their own party.

Representative Ken Buck, Republican of Colorado, [announced he would not seek re-election](#) after his dissatisfaction and sense of disconnect with the G.O.P. had grown too great. Mr. Buck, who voted to oust Representative Kevin McCarthy from the speakership, has denounced his party’s election denialism and many members’ refusal to condemn the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

“We lost our way,” Mr. Buck told The New York Times this month. “We have an identity crisis in the Republican Party. If we can’t address the election denier issue and we continue down that path, we won’t have credibility with the American people that we are going to solve problems.”

Representative Debbie Lesko, Republican of Arizona, said [in a statement](#) during the speaker fight last month that she would not run again.

“Right now, Washington, D.C., is broken; it is hard to get anything done,” she said.

The trend extends even to the most influential members of Congress; Representative Kay Granger, the 80-year-old Texas Republican who chairs the powerful Appropriations Committee, announced she would retire at the end of her 14th term. Even if her party manages to keep control of the House, Ms. Granger, the longest-serving G.O.P. congresswoman, faced term limits that would have forced her from the helm of the spending panel.

Few of the retirements thus far appear likely to alter the balance of power in Congress, where the vast majority of House seats are gerrymandered to be safe for one party or the other. Prime exceptions include Senator Joe Manchin III, Democrat of West Virginia, whose retirement will almost certainly mean that Republicans can claim the state's Senate seat and [get a leg up to win control of that chamber](#).

The decision of Representative Abigail Spanberger, a Democrat, to leave her seat in a competitive Virginia district to seek the governorship [also gives Republicans a prime pickup opportunity](#).

And Representative George Santos, Republican of New York, announced he would not seek re-election after a [House Ethics Committee report found](#) "substantial evidence" that he had violated federal law. His exit will give Democrats a chance to reclaim the suburban Long Island seat he flipped to the G.O.P. last year.

Many others are likely to be succeeded by members of their own party.

Representative Dean Phillips, Democrat of Minnesota, who last month announced a [long-shot bid to challenge President Biden](#) for his party's nomination, said this week that he would [step aside to focus on that race](#). Mr. Biden won his district by 21 percentage points in 2020, [according to data compiled by Daily Kos](#), making it all but certain that Democrats will hold the seat.

Representative Bill Johnson, Republican of Ohio, said he would [accept a job as president of Youngstown State University](#). His seat, too, is all but sure to be held by the G.O.P.; former President Donald J. Trump won the district by more than 28 percentage points in 2020.

Some members not seeking re-election have determined they can affect more change from outside Congress, where they do not have to contend with the same infighting, gridlock and attention-seeking that now frequently drive the place.

"I think I will have as much or more impact as a civilian as I would as a member of Congress, especially having to be involved in a pretty toxic political environment," Mr. Blumenauer said.

Lawmakers typically do not choose to leave office when their party looks poised to regain power in the next election cycle, and Democrats see an opening to regain the House majority next year. But Mr. Blumenauer, who would be a senior member of the

powerful Ways and Means Committee should his party win the House, said he would rather not sacrifice time with his family.

“It’s tempting,” said Mr. Blumenauer. “I’m going to continue working on the things I care about, but with a renewed commitment to family, friends and fun.”

Robert Jimison contributed reporting.