

Committee Musical Chairs

120th Congress: Senate

In the 120th Congress, 11 Senate committees will have new Chairs or Ranking Members.

13 senators will not return to their seats next term – four Democrats and nine Republicans. Additionally, Sens. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) are not up for reelection but will resign if they win their respective governors' races.

The 120th Congress-elect will begin to organize within weeks of the election, setting off a real-time game of musical chairs for committee leadership. In the Senate, where seniority generally dictates the gavel, the array of possibilities is clarified as senators indicate their intentions in advance. The following represents our informed speculation based on "known knowns," with further clarification to come in the weeks and months ahead.

Although the election is still more than 100 days away, this document reflects Republicans maintaining control of the Senate.

TIBER CREEK GROUP



July 15, 2026

*In a Republican majority

Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Chair: John Boozman (R-AR) | **Ranking Member:** Michael Bennet (D-CO)*

Vacancies (6).

Majority: Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Tommy Tuberville (R-AL)

Minority: Dick Durbin (D-IL), Tina Smith (D-MN), Ranking Member Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)*

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittees on Rural Development, Energy, and Credit (Ernst)
- Chair, Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research (McConnell)

Outlook

➔ **Ranking Member Klobuchar** will resign from the Senate if she wins her gubernatorial race. **Sen. Bennet** is the next in line by seniority to serve as Ranking Member.
**If former Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) wins in November, he could have seniority over Sen. Bennet.*

Appropriations

Chair: Susan Collins (R-ME) | **Ranking Member:** Patty Murray (D-WA)

Vacancies (5); Competitive Races (3).

Majority: Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

Minority: Dick Durbin (D-IL), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Gary Peters (D-MI)

Competitive Races: Susan Collins (R-ME), Jon Husted (R-OH), Jon Ossoff (D-GA)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Defense (McConnell)
- Chair, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (Graham)
- Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and FDA (Shaheen)

Outlook

➔ Three Senators on the Appropriations Committee are in competitive races. **Chair Collins** is in a toss-up Senate race and **Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)** is next in line for the top Republican spot on the Committee. **Sen. Husted** and **Sen. Ossoff** are both in highly competitive seats. Sen. Ossoff serves as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

Armed Services

Chair: Roger Wicker (R-MS) | **Ranking Member:** Jack Reed (D-RI)

Vacancies (4); Competitive Races (1).

Majority: Joni Ernst (R-IA), Tommy Tuberville (R-AL)

Minority: Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Gary Peters (D-MI)

Competitive: Dan Sullivan (R-AK)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support (Ernst)
- Chair, Subcommittee on Personnel (Tuberville)

Outlook

➔ **Chairman Wicker** and **Ranking Member Reed** are expected to remain in their roles. **Sen. Sullivan** is in a toss-up race and serves as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support.

Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

Chair: Tim Scott (R-SC) | **Ranking Member:** Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)*

Vacancies (3).

Majority: Thom Tillis (R-NC), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY)

Minority: Tina Smith (D-MN)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Protection (Tillis)
- Chair, Subcommittee on Digital Assets (Lummis)
- Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development (Smith)

Outlook

- ➔ **Chairman Scott** and **Ranking Member Warren** are expected to remain in leadership roles.
**If former Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) wins in November, he could have seniority over Ranking Member Warren.*

Budget

Chair: Chuck Grassley (R-IA) | **Ranking Member:** Tim Kaine (D-VA)

Vacancies (2).

Majority: John Cornyn (R-TX), Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

Outlook

- ➔ **Sen. Grassley** will serve as Chairman for the 120th Congress. **Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI)** will take over as Chairman for the remainder of **Chairman Graham's** term. **Sen. Kaine** is expected to become Ranking Member, as current **Ranking Member Jeff Merkley (D-OR)** is expected to become the top Democrat on the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Chair: Ted Cruz (R-TX) | **Ranking Member:** Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

Vacancies (2); Competitive Race (1).

Majority: Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)*

Minority: Gary Peters (D-MI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)*

Competitive Race: Dan Sullivan (R-AK)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines and Safety (Peters)
- Chair, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Technology, and Data Privacy (Blackburn)

Outlook

- ➔ **Chairman Cruz** and **Ranking Member Cantwell** are expected to remain in their leadership roles. **Sen. Sullivan** is in a toss-up seat for 2026 and currently serves as Chair of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard, Maritime, and Fisheries. **Sen. Blackburn** will resign from the Senate if she wins her gubernatorial race.

Energy and Natural Resources

Chair: Dave McCormick (R-PA) | **Ranking Member:** Martin Heinrich (D-NM)

Vacancies (2).

Majority: Steve Daines (R-MT), Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on National Parks (Daines)

Outlook

- ➔ Current **Chairman Lee** will likely become the top Republican on Judiciary. Republican Conference rules prohibit the party floor leader and assistant party floor leader from serving as chair or ranking member on any standing committees, so Sen. John Barrasso (R-AR) – who is next in line by seniority – will not become ENR Chairman again. **Sen. McCormick** would be next in line for the gavel.

Environment and Public Works

Chair: Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) | **Ranking Member:** Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

Vacancies (2); Competitive Races (2).

Majority: Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

Competitive Races: Dan Sullivan (R-AK), Jon Husted (R-OH)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Clean Air, Climate, and Nuclear Innovation and Safety (Lummis)

Outlook

- ➔ **Ranking Member Whitehouse** could become Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee. **Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)** is next in seniority but will keep his role on HELP, so **Sen. Merkley** could become EPW's top Democrat and cede his role as Ranking Member on Budget.

Finance

Chair: Mike Crapo (R-ID) | **Ranking Member:** Ron Wyden (D-OR)

Vacancies (5).

Majority: John Cornyn (R-TX), Steve Daines (R-MT), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)*

Minority: Tina Smith (D-MN)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs and Global Competitiveness (Cornyn)
- Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Growth (Smith)

Outlook

- ➔ **Chairman Crapo** and **Ranking Member Wyden** are expected to remain in their respective roles.

Foreign Relations

Chair: Jim Risch (R-ID) | **Ranking Member:** Chris Coons (D-DE)

Vacancies (3).

Majority: Steve Daines (R-MT), John Cornyn (R-TX)

Minority: Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation (Daines)

Outlook

- ➔ **Sen. Coons** is expected to become the top Democrat on SFRC following Ranking Member Shaheen's retirement.

Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Chair: Rand Paul (R-KY), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), or Roger Marshall (R-KS) | **Ranking Member:** Bernie Sanders (I-VT)

Vacancies (3); Competitive Races (1).

Majority: Chairman Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), Alan Armstrong (R-OK)

Competitive Races: Susan Collins (R-ME)

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Education and the American Family (Tuberville)

Outlook

- ➔ **Chairman Cassidy** will not return to the 120th Congress. **Sen. Paul** or **Sen. Murkowski** would be up for the Chair position if Sen. Collins remains on Appropriations. **Sen. Roger Marshall (R-KS)** has expressed interest and could take the gavel if Sens. Paul and Murkowski remain on their current committees.

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chair: Rand Paul (R-KY) or James Lankford (R-OK) | **Ranking Member:** Maggie Hassan (D-NH)

Vacancies (2).

Majority: Joni Ernst (R-IA)

Minority: Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI)

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

- ➔ **Subcommittee Chairman Ron Johnson (R-WI)** and **Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)** will remain in their roles on the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, HSGAC's chief investigative subcommittee. The Subcommittee is tasked with broad authority to investigate crimes, fraud and violations of consumer protections, and threats to national security. It is the only Senate subcommittee with unilateral subpoena authority.

Outlook

- ➔ **Sen. Hassan** will succeed retiring **Ranking Member Peters**. If Chairman Paul goes to HELP, **Sen. Lankford** will become Chairman. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) is next in seniority but hit his term limit as Chairman.

Indian Affairs

Chair: Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) | **Ranking Member:** TBD/Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV)*

Vacancies (3).

Majority: Steve Daines (R-MT), Alan Armstrong (R-OK)

Minority: Tina Smith (D-MN)

Outlook

→ If **Ranking Member Brian Schatz (D-HI)** becomes Whip, **Sen. Cortez Masto** could become Ranking Member of Indian Affairs – depending on which committee Sen. Schatz waives his leadership position on.

Judiciary

Chair: Mike Lee (R-UT) | **Ranking Member:** Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

Vacancies (4).

Majority: Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Thom Tillis (R-NC), John Cornyn (R-TX), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)*

Minority: Ranking Member Dick Durbin (D-IL), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)*

Open Subcommittee Leadership Roles

- Chair, Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration (Cornyn)
- Chair, Subcommittee on Intellectual Property (Tillis)
- Chair, Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law (Blackburn)
- Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Crime and Counterterrorism (Durbin)
- Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law (Klobuchar)

Outlook

→ **Chairman Grassley** reached his three-term limit as Judiciary Chair, and will return to chair the Senate Budget Committee. **Sen. Lee** is slated to become Chairman for the 120th Congress. **Ranking Member Durbin** is retiring at the end of the 119th Congress, and **Sen. Whitehouse** is likely to take the Ranking Member position.

Rules and Administration

Chair: Deb Fischer (R-NE) | **Ranking Member:** Alex Padilla (D-CA)

Vacancies (1).

Majority: Chairman Mitch McConnell (R-KY)

Minority: Amy Klobuchar (D-NM)*

Competitive Races: Jon Ossoff (D-GA)

Outlook

→ **Chairman McConnell** is retiring, and **Sen. Fischer** is likely to assume the top Republican spot. Sen. Fischer previously served as the Committee's Ranking Member from 2023-2025.

Small Business and Entrepreneurship

Chair: Todd Young (R-IN) | **Ranking Member:** Ed Markey (D-MA)

Vacancies (2); Competitive Race (1).

Majority: Chair Joni Ernst (R-IA)

Minority: Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

Competitive Races: Jon Husted (R-OH)

Outlook

→ **Sen. Young** has expressed interest in succeeding **Chair Ernst** in the 120th Congress.

Veterans' Affairs

Chair: Jerry Moran (R-KS) | **Ranking Member:** Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)

Vacancies (2); Competitive (1).

Majority: Thom Tillis (R-NC), Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)*

Competitive Races: Dan Sullivan (R-AK)

Outlook

→ **Chairman Moran** and **Ranking Member Blumenthal** will remain in their roles for the 120th Congress.

Select Committee on Ethics

Chair: Subject to Majority Leader's Appointment | **Ranking Member:** Subject to Appointment

Vacancies (1).

Minority: Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

Outlook

→ **Chairman Lankford** could become HSGAC Chairman if **Sen. Paul** goes to HELP. Ethics Chair would be subject to the Majority Leader's appointment. Ranking Member Coons is likely to become Ranking Member of SFRC and Democratic Leadership would appoint new members to the Committee.

Aging

Chair: Rick Scott (R-FL) | **Ranking Member:** Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)

Vacancies (1); Competitive Races (1).

Majority: Tommy Tuberville (R-AL)

Competitive Races: Jon Husted (R-OH)

Select Committee on Intelligence

Chair: Tom Cotton (R-AR) | **Ranking Member:** Mark Warner (D-VA)

Vacancies (1); Competitive Races (2).

Majority: John Cornyn (R-TX)

Competitive Races: Susan Collins (R-ME), Jon Ossoff (D-GA)



Committee Leadership Rules

- > Senate committee leadership is governed by a mix of formal rules and party practice. The majority party holds every committee chairmanship, with the minority's senior member serving as Ranking Member – an arrangement that flips entirely if control of the chamber changes hands.
- > Each party's Steering Committee recommends committee assignments and leadership posts, which are then approved by the full conference (Republicans) or caucus (Democrats). Subcommittee assignments are the responsibility of the committees themselves and do not require Senate approval through formal floor action.
- > Within each party, seniority on the committee itself (not overall Senate tenure) is the traditional basis for claiming a gavel, though this is a Senate norm rather than a rule, and a senator can decline or be passed over.
- > A senator is generally limited to chairing one full committee at a time, and service on an exclusive committee – such as Appropriations, Finance, Armed Services, or Foreign Relations – restricts additional major committee assignments.
- > Senate Republicans have generally imposed a six-year term limit on chairs and ranking members, while Democrats have not adopted a comparable hard limit.
- > The Senate Democratic Whip, Dick Durbin (D-IL), is retiring, and Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) has secured the votes to become Whip next Congress. Party rules restrict the Whip from holding more than one committee or subcommittee leadership post. Sen. Schatz is likely to give up one of his roles as the top Democrat on an Appropriations Subcommittee or the Committee on Indian Affairs. The Republican Conference rules also prohibit the party floor leader and assistant party floor leader from serving as chair or ranking member on any standing committees, but they may still serve as chair or ranking member of non-standing committees.