

## The 2026 House Retirement Party

*di Geoffrey Skelley*

### A record number of House members are retiring

#### **Quick summary:**

- *A whopping 44 U.S. House members have announced they are retiring or running for another office, a larger total than at this same point in any federal election cycle dating back to 1974. This record-setting figure likely connects at least in part to the dissatisfaction commonly heard from sitting members about their experiences serving in the House.*
- *And there could be more retirements on the way. The candidate filing deadline has passed in only five states, and 42 states have deadlines in February or later. That leaves plenty of time for incumbents to gauge where the 2026 electoral environment stands and to decide not to run again.*

As [you may have heard](#), members of [the U.S. House of Representatives](#) are saying “[bye, bye, bye](#)” in droves. Fact is, many are “[leaving on a jet plane](#)” and happily don’t know when they will be back again. Whatever your song reference might be, it is clear that [few of these outgoing members](#) would say that they “[had the time of \[their\] life](#)” serving in Congress’s lower chamber.

Just how remarkable is the ongoing exodus? A whopping 44 House members have announced they are retiring or running for another office, a larger total than at this same point in any federal election cycle dating back to 1974. And that figure *does not* include members who are leaving before their terms are up, [such as Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene](#). That’s because many who resign early will be replaced by special elections before the end of Congress, whereas retirees and seekers of other offices will mostly have regularly-timed open-seat races to succeed them.

In terms of party, more Republicans are heading for the exits than Democrats — but not that many more. At this point, 25 GOP House members have announced their departures, compared with 19 Democrats. Still, this does fit a common pattern: In midterm cycles, members from the president’s party tend to be somewhat more likely to exit in the face of [the electoral headwinds that party often faces](#). That might include an incumbent from a highly competitive district who faces a difficult reelection fight, or a long-tenured member in a safe seat who decides it’s no longer worth hanging around if there is a good chance the party will lose its House majority. Perhaps not coincidentally, the previous record holder for departures by early January was the 2018 election cycle, back in President Donald Trump’s first term in office. By Jan. 4 of that year, 41 members had announced retirements or bids for other office. The party split was notably larger, though, as almost twice as many Republicans (27) were leaving the House as Democrats (14). Tellingly, in November 2018, Democrats made major gains and recaptured a House majority.

More broadly, the number of members who announce their retirements or bids for other offices by early January has generally been higher in the Trump Era than before. At least for the GOP, the changing nature of the party has precipitated some sizable turnover. For instance, following Trump’s election in 2016, many old school Republicans [decided they no longer wanted to stick around](#). And members from both parties [have made it clear](#) that serving in the House or on Capitol Hill these days does not often correspond to high levels of job satisfaction.

Now, growing dissatisfaction could help explain the recent uptick in departures by early January of an election year, but it’s worth noting other factors that may play a role. On average, states hold primaries earlier than they used to, which means states generally have earlier candidate filing deadlines. As a result, House members have a shorter timeline to decide on their plans for the next campaign. As a simple comparison, just consider how congressional primary dates have shifted every 10 years over the past half century. In [1976](#) and [1986](#), the median primary date across the 50 states was in early August. After that, the median date moved forward to hover

in mid-to-late June in the [1996](#), [2006](#), and [2016](#) cycles. And as it stands, the median primary date for the 2026 cycle is June 9, an even earlier point in the calendar.

Increased candidate fundraising pressure has also compelled earlier candidacy decisions. For those seeking a higher (and often more expensive) office, [they need to start their campaigns earlier](#) to give themselves more time to raise money ahead of the primary and/or general elections. For those who are retiring, an earlier departure announcement hands their potential successors [more time to raise money](#) for the ensuing House campaign.

Looking at the list of 44 departing members, somewhat more (26) are running for another office rather than hanging up their electoral spurs (18). Overall, eight hail from seats that neither party's presidential nominee carried by more than 10 percentage points in 2024, a group of seats most likely to be sternly contested by both parties this November. Still, most of these members are leaving behind seats that are safe for one party or the other, which will make primaries the main decision point in most of them.

While the total number of departures in 2018 and 2026 showed broad similarities, a big difference between them is the ratio of Republican incumbents retiring versus seeking another office. In 2018, 17 of the 27 Republicans who had announced their exits by early January were retiring. This time around, though, almost 3 in 4 departing Republicans are seeking a different office — 18 of 25. (In both cycles, Democrats saw a more even mix of retirements and bids for other posts).

One contributing factor could be somewhat greater resistance to retirement among Republicans sitting in competitive seats. Back in 2018, six Republicans in seats that Trump carried by 10 points or fewer in 2016 had announced their retirements by early January. This included four in seats that Trump carried by fewer than 5 points (or that Hillary Clinton carried). This time around, four in comparable seats are retiring or running elsewhere. Of those, just one (Arizona Rep. David Schweikert) holds a seat with under a 5-point presidential margin in 2024.

This is at least partly a result of Trump [successfully pushing](#) GOP incumbents in competitive seats to seek reelection instead of running for other offices. Notable

examples include [New York Rep. Mike Lawler](#) and [Iowa Rep. Zach Nunn](#), each of whom were seriously considering gubernatorial bids in 2026 before backing away after hearing from Trump. That Trump has urged incumbents to stay put makes sense: Although the incumbency advantage in House elections [has shrunk](#) significantly, sitting members still give their party a slightly better chance of retaining a seat compared with an open-seat race.

Fact is, we are still a long way from knowing the full retirement picture in the House. At this point, the candidate filing deadline has passed in only five states, and 42 states have deadlines in February or later. So while candidate filing deadlines tend to be earlier than in the past, plenty of time remains for incumbents to gauge where the 2026 electoral environment stands and, perhaps, to decide against running again.

And when it comes to retirement watch, the full effect of mid-decade redistricting has not necessarily struck yet. Take California. The Democratic-drawn congressional map [targeted five GOP incumbents](#), including Rep. Kevin Kiley, [who has not revealed his plans for 2026](#). Most of Kiley's former district ended up in clearly blue-leaning seats where he will have a difficult time winning, so a retirement decision is plausible. Conversely, in Missouri, should the [Republican-drawn congressional map take effect](#) for November 2026, Democratic Rep. Emanuel Cleaver would have to mount a reelection campaign in a Trump +18 seat, which might prompt him to reconsider running again. And should Utah's [new court-ordered map](#) with three solidly Republican seats remain in effect, one of the state's four GOP incumbents might retire rather than run in a primary against a fellow incumbent.

Just how many retirements might the 2026 cycle end up with? We obviously cannot know for sure, but the figure could end up well north of 44. It also could be debatable because counting retirements can sometimes be a moving target. For instance, a House member running for another office might resign to focus on their campaign. In the time between the resignation and the regular 2026 election, a special election could fill the outgoing member's seat such that a new member gets elected and then runs in November as the seat's new incumbent. How to count that resigning member — is it someone running for another office or someone resigning — is admittedly

somewhat esoteric, but slightly different methodologies can affect how we compare retirement figures across elections.

Still, looking at the current numbers and the common refrain of “#congresssucks” among sitting members, this cycle could get within spitting distance of the 66 or so retirements in the entirety of the 1992 election cycle, which [holds the modern record](#) for total departing members (no matter how you define the categories). The next couple of months will likely determine how near the 2026 election comes to that mark.

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### 🌀 No Red Or Blue, Just Green 🌀

Blake Burman [on prediction markets](#):

#### The “Donroe Doctrine?”

One question we are likely to continue to hear over the coming days into weeks is who exactly is running Venezuela. President Trump said over the weekend the U.S. will temporarily run the country.

“We can’t take a chance that somebody else takes over Venezuela that doesn’t have the good of the Venezuelan people in mind,” the Commander in Chief said.



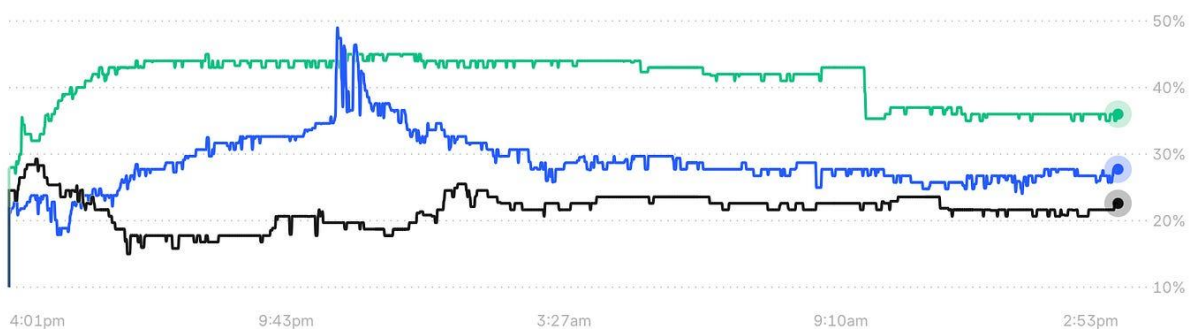
Politics

## Who will lead Venezuela at the end of 2026?



● Edmundo González 36% ● María Corina Machado 28% ● Delcy Rodríguez 23%

Kalshi



\$1,209,207 vol

1D 1W 1M ALL

Courtesy: Kalshi

Right now there isn't much conviction in the prediction markets as to who will be leading Venezuela in the long term.

Delcy Rodriguez is the current head according to Venezuelan law, but she is pushing back on U.S. actions and [that won't sit well with the Trump administration](#). Edmundo Gonzalez, who rightfully won the 2024 election, and Maria Corina Machado, the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize winner, are viewed as other frontrunners.

I didn't get a straight answer about who is running the country when I asked a key D.C. lawmaker who had recently spoken with Secretaries Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth.