



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on December 22, 2021

Sen. John Thune, McConnell's Right Hand, Considering Retirement

Senator John Thune (R-S.D.), the Senate minority whip and the second-highest ranking Republican in the chamber, is reportedly considering retiring upon completion of his current term, which ends in 2023.

The possibility that Thune would choose not to run again in 2022 is surprising, given that he is poised to become Senate Majority Leader if the GOP retakes the Senate and current Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (KY), who is 79 years old, retires.

According to the [New York Times](#), Thune is telling people back in his home state that next year may be his last on Capitol Hill.

The Republican leader is reportedly weighing both family issues and the influence of Donald Trump on the party. Thune has previously expressed disagreement with the 45th president, who has called for a primary challenger against Thune.

Thune won his first term to the U.S. Senate in 2005. His 2016 reelection bid saw him take 71 percent of the vote. Prior to his time in the Senate, Thune represented South Dakota's at-large congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1997 to 2003.

Mark Mowry, a political newcomer who calls himself an "America First" candidate, has already launched a primary challenge against Thune. The primary contest is set to be held in June 2022.

As Fox News notes:

Thune has repeatedly faced the ire of Trump, who labeled him a "weak and ineffective RINO." Trump has also referred to Thune as "Mitch's boy," in reference to McConnell, and warned that Thune would be "primaried in 2022, political career over." Trump called on Gov. Kristi Noem, R-S.D., to challenge Thune.

Thune faced backlash from Trump supporters when he voted to certify the 2020 presidential election results.

Per a source, Thune plans to make an announcement before the end of the year.

Thune has [accused](#) supporters of President Trump of engaging in "cancel culture" for holding pro-impeachment members of the party such as Representative Liz Cheney (R-Wy.) accountable.

During his first interview given since voting to acquit President Trump in the impeachment trial, Thune defended Republicans who sided with Democrats to cast a "vote of conscience" to convict.

"There was a strong case made," Thune said of Democrats' impeachment case. "People could come to



AP Images
John Thune



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different conclusions. If we're going to criticize the media and the left for cancel culture, we can't be doing that ourselves."

Thune also said it was "inexcusable" that President Trump allegedly incited an insurrection at the January 6 Capitol protest, accusing him of undermining the peaceful transfer of power.

Moreover, Thune made clear he will take an active role in primaries to defend establishment Republicans such as Cheney against Trumpian challengers.

From [Politico](#):

Thune suggested he would be taking steps to assist candidates "who don't go off and talk about conspiracies and that sort of thing." He praised Rep. Liz Cheney, a Wyoming Republican, who was censured by the Wyoming GOP for voting to impeach Trump, for doing an "exceptional job on most issues" and said he was ready to jump into primary battles like the one she is sure to face.

"At the grassroots level, there's a lot of people who want to see Trump-like candidates," he said. "But I think we're going to be looking for candidates that are electable."

President Trump has also taken regular aim at McConnell since the 2020 election.

"How this guy can stay as Leader is beyond comprehension — this is coming not only from me, but from virtually everyone in the Republican Party," Trump recently wrote of McConnell. "He is a disaster and should be replaced as 'Leader' ASAP!"

Nevertheless, few Republicans in the Senate are willing to side with Trump — whom most in the GOP publicly profess to staunchly support — against the longtime Kentucky senator.

Thus far, only two Trump-endorsed Republican senate candidates, and no sitting senators, have pledged to vote for someone other than McConnell. No formidable challenger for the party's leadership in the chamber has yet appeared.

Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.) won thanks to an endorsement from President Trump. But even he claims McConnell is doing "a good job."

Kelly Tshibaka, an Alaska Republican who is challenging incumbent Senator Lisa Murkowski, and Eric Greitens, the former governor of Missouri who is running for a seat being vacated by retiring Senator Roy Blunt, are the two Trump-backed candidates who have publicly come out against McConnell.

"You're going to see a whole lot of leaders in the Senate, like me, not support Mitch McConnell for leadership because he's anything but a leader," [said](#) Tshibaka, who is challenging one of Trump's top targets in the chamber.



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