Post 2026 Elections: Congressional Outlook

Leadership transition, lame-duck agenda, and policy priorities for 2027

Executive Summary

Democrats are projected to take control of both the House and Senate, ending Republican control of Congress and creating divided government for the final two years of President Trump's term. As of 9:09 a.m. ET on November 5, at least 241 House seats had been called for Democrats and 162 for Republicans, leaving 32 contests uncalled. Democrats had secured at least 54 Senate seats to Republicans' 44, with Alaska and Mississippi still unresolved. The final House margin and Senate balance remain unsettled, but Democrats will control committees, floor scheduling, and oversight authority in both chambers.

- **House:** Democratic control projected; at least 241 Democratic seats and 162 Republican seats called, with 32 contests uncalled; Democrats have gained a net 29 seats.
- **Senate:** Democratic control projected; 54 Democratic seats and 44 Republican seats called, with Alaska and Mississippi uncalled; net Democratic gain of seven seats.
- **Leadership:** House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries is the likely candidate for Speaker, subject to Democratic caucus action and the January floor vote; Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer is the likely Majority Leader for the 120th Congress, subject to caucus elections.
- **Lame duck:** Government funding, the National Defense Authorization Act, and the Water Resources Development Act remain the clearest must-pass or traditionally bipartisan vehicles.
- **2027:** A Democratic Congress facing a Republican White House will emphasize oversight, nominations leverage, and negotiated must-pass or bipartisan legislation rather than broad partisan enactments.

Election Results at a Glance

Measure	House	Senate
Control	Democratic control projected	Democratic control projected
Projected balance	At least 241 D–162 R; 32 uncalled	54 D–44 R; 2 uncalled (including aligned independents)
Net change	Net +29 Democratic seats	+7 Democratic seats
Outstanding contests	32 contests uncalled; final majority size remains unsettled	Alaska and Mississippi remain uncalled
Governing margin	Democrats have secured at least 241 seats, providing meaningful floor flexibility; the final margin will still shape attendance risk and coalition needs.	Democrats have secured at least 54 seats; either unresolved race could expand the majority, while most legislation would still require bipartisan support to reach 60 votes.

Reporting note: Snapshot as of 9:09 a.m. ET on November 5, 2026. Chamber control is projected, not certified. House totals reflect called races and will change as 32 outstanding contests are resolved; Alaska and Mississippi remain uncalled in the Senate.

Chamber Leadership

The tables below are limited to the four principal chamber leadership positions relevant to this report. Until caucus and conference elections and the House floor vote in January, describe prospective leaders as “likely” rather than confirmed. Update a position to official only after the relevant election or vote.

House of Representatives

Position	119th Congress baseline	Likely 120th Congress leader / status
Speaker	Mike Johnson (R-LA)	Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) — likely Speaker; subject to Democratic caucus action and the January floor vote.
Minority Leader	Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)	Steve Scalise (R-LA) or Jim Jordan (R-OH) — likely Minority Leader candidates; unresolved pending Republican conference elections.

Senate

Position	119th Congress baseline	Likely 120th Congress leader / status
Majority Leader	John Thune (R-SD)	Chuck Schumer (D-NY) — likely Majority Leader; pending Democratic caucus election
Minority Leader	Chuck Schumer (D-NY)	John Thune (R-SD) — likely Minority Leader; pending Republican conference election

Key Committee Leadership

Key Committees	119th Chair	119th Ranking Member	120th Update
House Appropriations	Tom Cole (R-OK), Chair	Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Ranking Member	Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), likely Chair; Tom Cole (R-OK), likely Ranking Member.
Senate Appropriations	Susan Collins (R-ME), Chair	Patty Murray (D-WA), Vice Chair	Patty Murray (D-WA), likely Chair; Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), likely Ranking Member.

Key Committees	119th Chair	119th Ranking Member	120th Update
House Energy & Commerce	Brett Guthrie (R-KY), Chair	Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ), Ranking Member	Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ), likely Chair; Brett Guthrie (R-KY), likely Ranking Member.
Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation	Ted Cruz (R-TX), Chair	Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ranking Member	Maria Cantwell (D-WA), likely Chair; Ted Cruz (R-TX), likely Ranking Member.
Senate Energy & Natural Resources	Mike Lee (R-UT), Chair	Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Ranking Member	Martin Heinrich (D-NM), likely Chair; Mike Lee (R-UT), likely Ranking Member.
Senate Environment & Public Works	Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Chair	Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Ranking Member	Jeff Merkley (D-OR), likely Chair; Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), likely Ranking Member.
House Ways & Means	Jason Smith (R-MO), Chair	Richard Neal (D-MA), Ranking Member	Richard Neal (D-MA), likely Chair; Jason Smith (R-MO), likely Ranking Member.
Senate Finance	Mike Crapo (R-ID), Chair	Ron Wyden (D-OR), Ranking Member	Ron Wyden (D-OR), likely Chair; Mike Crapo (R-ID), likely Ranking Member.

Leadership note: Final assignments remain subject to caucus and conference elections, steering decisions, committee ratios, and membership changes.

Lame-Duck Agenda

The lame-duck session is the period after the November election in which the outgoing Congress retains full legislative authority before the new Congress convenes. In 2026, the formal period runs from Election Day, November 3, through noon on January 3, 2027. Practical floor activity is expected to be concentrated in November and December, with the Senate targeting adjournment on December 18. The agenda is likely to focus on a small number of must-pass or traditionally bipartisan measures.

- **FY2027 appropriations:** Enact either the 12 FY27 appropriations bills, or a continuing resolution extending current government funding into 2027 while Congress continues work on the remaining FY2027 appropriations bills.
- **Defense authorization:** Finalize the National Defense Authorization Act, a principal year-end vehicle that could also carry targeted semiconductor export-control provisions.
- **Water infrastructure:** Advance the Water Resources Development Act as a traditionally bipartisan measure.
- **Issues likely deferred to 2027:** With the incoming Democratic majority, broad energy permitting reform, highway infrastructure reauthorization, AI and data center policy are now more likely to carry into the next Congress.

Congressional Focus for 2027

Anticipated Agenda

- **Organization and staffing:** Leadership votes, committee ratios, chairs, ranking members, and subcommittee assignments.
- **Budget and fiscal strategy:** Budget resolution, debt limit increase, finishing any remaining FY27 appropriations bills, and working on FY28 appropriations bills as well.
- **Tax and economic policy:** Likely tax, tariff, and trade policy debates. Heavy focus on consumer cost-of-living impacts.
- **Energy, environment, and permitting:** Revisiting permitting legislation, data center energy usage, clean energy tax credits, nuclear waste policy refresh, plastics/PFAS/pesticides policy and regulation.
- **Technology:** AI frontier model vetting/safety, privacy, children's on-line safety, export controls for microchips, state vs. federal regulation of AI.
- **Health policy:** Addressing recent changes/spending cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, drug pricing, health insurance coverage.
- **Oversight and nominations:** Aggressive oversight/investigation of Trump Administration actions and alleged corruption, much more limited judicial and executive branch nominations.

Looking Forward

Taft's Public Affairs Strategies Group will continue to monitor the results and provide further updates as appropriate.

Questions about the results?

Reach out to Taft's Public Affairs Strategies Group to discuss what the new federal landscape means for your priorities.

