

US House retirements signal deepening crisis for Republican Party

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On Monday, Republican representative Kenny Marchant announced his retirement from the US Congress, indicating that he would not seek re-election in his Texas district in the upcoming 2020 elections. Marchant is the twelfth on the “casualty list” of Republicans leaving office this term and the fourth from Texas to announce his retirement in recent weeks.

Marchant’s announcement followed the abrupt news of the retirements of Texas Republican representatives Will Hurd on Thursday and Mike Conaway on Tuesday of last week. Pete Olson, also of Texas, announced his retirement on July 25.

These desertions are an expression of the crisis of the Trump administration and the Republican Party, which confront broad popular hostility going into the upcoming elections, internal strife over Trump’s fascist strategy and methods, and disaffection resulting from Trump’s efforts to transform the party into a hierarchy based on personal loyalty to himself.

The “casualty list” maintained by the US House of Representatives Press Gallery, titled “left or leaving office,” so far includes Republicans Tom Marino (Pennsylvania), Susan Brooks (Indiana), Rob Woodall (Georgia), Bradley Byrne (Alabama), Greg Gianforte (Montana), Paul Mitchell (Michigan), Pete Olson (Texas), Martha Roby (Alabama), Rob Bishop (Utah), Mike Conaway (Texas), Will Hurd (Texas), and Kenny Marchant (Texas). Byrne and Gianforte are running for higher offices, but the other ten are leaving politics.

There are concerns among Republican Party officials that after the August recess, when members return to their districts for lengthy consultations with family and financial backers, and occasional encounters with actual constituents—many of whom are furiously anti-Trump and politically energized—the number of House retirees could double or triple.

Only two Democrats are retiring so far, one of whom is 75 years old and has contracted Parkinson’s disease. Ben Ray Luján, a member of the House Democratic leadership, is giving up his seat to run for an open US Senate seat in New Mexico.

In an immediate sense, the retirements reflect growing pessimism about the upcoming 2020 elections, with some of the retiring Republicans in danger of losing their seats—five won only narrow victories in 2018—and all of them expecting that the Democrats will retain their overall majority in the House of Representatives, leaving the Republicans a largely powerless minority.

The ongoing shift to the left in the American population, expressed most sharply in the wave of teachers’ strikes and other walkouts, but also shown in pro-immigrant demonstrations and other protests against the Trump administration’s outrages, finds only a very distorted expression in the US political system, with the two-party monopoly opposed to any challenge to the profit system.

Another distorting factor is the practice of gerrymandering, or drawing and redrawing districts for factional gain and to protect incumbents. The population is mostly squeezed into “safe” districts, in which politicians from one of the two big business parties are effectively unopposed, while a relatively small number of closely-monitored districts are the subject of any real electoral contest between the parties.

The 23rd District of Texas, where Hurd announced he will not seek re-election, is one of the handful of closely contested districts in that state. The district has changed hands five times since 1993. In the 2018 elections, Hurd won by an extremely narrow margin: 103,285 to 102,359.

Selectively embracing or excluding Hispanic and

poorer areas, it stretches from the suburbs of El Paso along 820 miles of the US-Mexico border to the suburbs of San Antonio. Federal judges in 2017 concluded that its borders were racially discriminatory and violated the Voting Rights Act.

Marchant is a member of the Tea Party Caucus and a former real estate developer who was first elected to Congress in 2004. His district, which lies within the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, was previously held by Democrats. In 2018, Marchant won narrowly by 133,317 to 125,231.

Pete Olson, whose district is located in and around Houston, Texas, also faced a close race. He had held his seat in last year's elections very narrowly by a vote of 152,720 to 138,153, having previously won in 2016 by a much wider margin of 181,864 to 123,679.

In bowing out of electoral races for closely-contested districts, Republican politicians are signaling that they are unwilling to devote time and resources to elections that they are unlikely to win. In addition, running in the 2020 elections would mean running alongside Trump, with the congressional candidate expected to support or at least defend Trump's fascistic statements and behavior.

"Serving in the era of Trump has few rewards," an unnamed Republican member of Congress recently told the *Hill*. "He has made an already hostile political environment worse. Every day there is some indefensible tweet or comment to defend or explain. It is exhausting and often embarrassing." Many of these retiring Republicans will go on to accept lucrative private consulting positions, leaving their erstwhile colleagues and constituents to their fate.

The Republican Party has been unable to stem the tide of desertions, which have occasioned a degree of gloating from the Democrat-aligned media, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. This is a superficial response to what is a deeper crisis of the two-party system.

While House Republicans are making conventional political estimations in deciding that the outlook for electoral success in 2020 is poor, Trump is conducting himself on a different basis. His calculations revolve around the building of a fascistic movement centered on his own personality rather than the Republican Party as an institution, and operating outside the framework of electoral politics to provide the basis for an

authoritarian regime. Establishment Republicans like Brooks, Marchant, Roby and Hurd are simply out of step.

Media coverage over the past week has placed particular emphasis on the departure of Hurd, whom the *Washington Post* describes as "the lone black Republican" in the House of Representatives, on account of its racial dimension. Hurd announced his retirement in the wake of escalating fascistic rhetoric from Trump, which Hurd publicly condemned last month as "racist and xenophobic."

A staunch defender of imperialism with a career as an undercover CIA operative, Hurd had previously criticized Trump's border wall plans, voted against the declaration of a state of emergency at the border, and was one of only four Republicans to vote for a resolution condemning Trump's racist attacks on four Democratic congresswomen.



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