

Another leading House Republican decides to retire

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New York Congressman Peter King announced that he would not seek re-election to the House of Representatives next year. As the longest-serving Republican in New York's congressional delegation, his departure adds to a growing number of long-time Republican legislators who are abandoning the party in the run-up to the 2020 election, where they would share the ballot with President Donald Trump.

King represents an upscale district that extends along the south shore of Long Island, with a median household income of \$90,614, making it 21st out of 435 districts in the United States. He has held the seat for 28 years, starting out on the right wing of the Republican Party and ending up, without changing his own positions, characterized as a "moderate," because of the drastic shift to the right by the Republican Party and bourgeois politics as a whole.

While the 75-year-old King couched his departure in personal terms, it is clear that his retirement is at least in part a response to the defeat of the Republicans last year, and the likelihood that the Republicans will remain in the minority in 2020. The Republican losses in 2018 placed King in the minority and stripped him of most of his political influence in the House.

King's own margin of victory fell from 24 points in 2016 to 6 points in 2018, and 2020 was looking even closer. His likely opponent in next year's election is Jackie Gordon, an African-American councilwoman in Babylon, Long Island, who is a 29-year veteran of the US military.

Gordon's campaign website is typical of those candidates the WSWs profiled in the 2018 campaign as the CIA Democrats, veterans of the military-intelligence apparatus who highlighted their national-security credentials as the focus of their campaigns, in keeping with the Democrats' effort to divert all popular

opposition to Trump behind the CIA-instigated anti-Russia campaign.

Her campaign website declares: "Over her 29-year career in the Armed Forces, Jackie served our country overseas as a platoon leader in Germany during Operation Desert Storm, as an operations officer at Guantanamo Bay during the Global War on Terror, as a battle captain in Baghdad during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and as Commander of the 310th Military Police Battalion in Afghanistan in 2012. She retired from the Army Reserve with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2014."

King himself has the closest connections to the military-intelligence apparatus. He served two different terms as chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, and is particularly vociferous in his defense of domestic spying. But his political position has been undermined by the shift, over the past two elections, by upper-middle-class suburban voters like those in his district towards the Democrats.

The *New York Times* praises King for his ability to reach "across party lines to enact bipartisan legislation." While considered a moderate among current Republicans, King's political positions are far to the right. He has long been especially vicious on immigration. He was a co-sponsor of the 2005 Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act. The bill, which was passed by the House but not by the Senate, would have, among other things, supported the building of a wall along parts of the Mexican border, a decade before this issue was made infamous by Donald Trump. In 2006, King vehemently opposed the so-called guest worker program proposed by the Bush administration. "It's not the kind of issue you can compromise on. Either you're giving amnesty to people who are here illegally, or you aren't," railed

King.

Regarding unaccompanied minors crossing the Mexican border, King called last year for secret police-style “in-depth vetting” not only of unaccompanied minors, but of their host families—often distant relatives of the youth, their only connection in the US. “A disproportionate number of the MS-13 members are unaccompanied minors,” King said, echoing the demagogic accusations made by Trump.

The Republican has also been outspoken in attacking democratic rights, free speech and freedom of the press. He supports the frame-up and persecution of Julian Assange. In 2017, when the State Department announced new charges against Assange, alleging that he had conspired with Edward Snowden to disclose NSA spying, King stated, in an interview with CNN, “I’m glad that the Justice Department has found a way to go after Assange. He’s gotten a free ride for too long.” King had earlier said of Snowden, “I think Edward Snowden is a defector and a traitor.” According to King, “there were no abuses by the NSA.” He called for the prosecution of journalists, including Glenn Greenwald, who published material leaked by Snowden.

King’s departure reflects a growing political trend. Over the past several months, two dozen congressional Republicans have announced their retirements, far more than the number of Democrats doing the same. In some cases, as with Francis Rooney in Florida, the congressman publicly vacillated on the question of impeachment, and within a day or too had announced his retirement.

King sits on the House Intelligence Committee and has been at the Trump impeachment inquiry hearings. In his retirement statement, King said that he would vote against the Trump impeachment and would support him in the next election. However, his close ties with the military-intelligence apparatus, which is the major institutional force motivating the drive against Trump, could bring that into question.



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