

# Pelosi retires as House Democratic leader after narrow election defeat

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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Thursday that she would step down as leader of the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives, following the party's loss of its majority by a narrow margin in the November 8 midterm election.

The Republican Party reached the 218 seats that constitute a majority of the House after the Associated Press and other media "called" a suburban district in northern Los Angeles County for Republican incumbent Mike Garcia Wednesday. The Democrats are expected to hold 211 seats, with six seats still remaining to be decided by late-arriving mail ballots or recounts.

Pelosi announced her decision to a closed-door meeting of the Democratic caucus Thursday morning, then publicly in a speech on the House floor a few hours later. The occasion was carefully choreographed, with Pelosi's remarks followed within minutes by the declaration by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer that he too would not be a candidate for leadership, but would, like Pelosi, remain in the House as a "rank-and-file" member.

The result is a generational shift in the House Democratic leadership. Pelosi is 82, Hoyer 83, and the third-ranking Democrat, Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, is also 82. They are set to be replaced by a trio already approved by the three outgoing leaders: Hakeem Jeffries of New York, who will be Minority Leader when the new House reconvenes; Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, who will be Minority Whip; and Pete Aguilar of California, who will be chair of the Democratic Conference.

Clyburn will shift to a lesser position in the leadership, assistant minority leader, where he will work with Jeffries. Both men are members of the Congressional Black Caucus. The new lineup was immediately hailed by congressional Democrats and the pro-Democratic sections of the media for its "diversity," with a black man, a white woman, and a Hispanic man supposedly representing the

variety of the American people.

In reality, no less than the predominantly white, male lineup in the Republican Party leadership, all the Democratic leaders are capitalist politicians committed to the defense of American imperialism and the interests of the American capitalist class, like Pelosi. All have been thoroughly vetted by corporate America and the military-intelligence apparatus, as Pelosi was during her long tenure on the House Intelligence Committee.

After entering politics as a prolific fundraiser for the Democratic Party in San Francisco, Pelosi first sought elective office in 1987, after the incumbent congresswoman in her district, Sasha Burton, died of cancer. She won a 15-way primary in the heavily Democratic city, and has been reelected 23 times against only nominal Republican opposition.

While having long been demonized by the Republican Party as an advocate of ultra-liberal and even radical policies, Pelosi was a vehement opponent of socialism and defender of the capitalist system, on which her family fortune, estimated at nearly \$200 million, was based. The bulk of this money came in through the lucrative real estate investment firm run by her husband. Paul Pelosi was nearly killed by a pro-Trump fascist last month who invaded the family home looking for the congresswoman.

Nancy Pelosi's power within the Democratic caucus was tied largely to her access to big money, as she raised hundreds of millions of dollars over the years to sustain Democratic candidates who had more limited resources. As she moved up the ladder in the Democratic leadership, this money-raising provided an edge, both in insuring that members voted the "right" way on critical issues, and in gathering support in intra-party contests.

Pelosi became minority leader in 2003, when Representative Richard Gephardt gave up that post to make an unsuccessful bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. When the Democrats won control of the

House in 2006, largely due to popular opposition to the war in Iraq, Pelosi moved up to Speaker. She lost that position in 2010 after a Republican landslide, then regained it in 2018 after the Democrats benefited from popular revulsion against the Trump administration.

There are several key decisions made by Pelosi that underscore her commitment to the defense of American capitalism. In 2006, after the Democratic takeover of the House, she quickly scotched proposals to impeach Bush for lying about “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq. She also insisted on full funding for the barbaric US military operations that continued in that country.

Pelosi played a critical role in passing the first major bailout of the financial system after the Wall Street crash that followed the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. The bailout was initially defeated by a right-wing populist revolt among Republicans, supported by many liberals. The second vote provided a majority for propping up the banks at the expense of the American people.

In 2010 came what Democrats and the media hailed as her finest hour: engineering the passage of the Affordable Care Act, after the death of Senator Edward Kennedy and the unexpected Democratic defeat in the election for his open seat cost the Democrats their 60-vote supermajority in the Senate. The only possible avenue for enactment of the ACA was for the House to pass the exact version of the legislation that had passed the Senate before Kennedy’s death, and Pelosi exerted the pressure required to block consideration of any amendments and pass the bill, then signed into law by President Barack Obama.

Despite the howls of congressional Republicans, the ACA was a right-wing bill that maintained the domination of private corporations—insurance companies, drug and medical device manufacturers, hospital chains—in the US medical system, and provided them a new market of tens of millions of customers whose payments were guaranteed by the federal government. There was not even a public “option” for patients, and the level of guaranteed care was both minimal and expensive.

While this was largely omitted in the admiring accounts of Pelosi’s career published Thursday evening in the corporate media, perhaps the most significant action she took during the Biden administration was her visit to Taiwan in August. She defied warnings from Beijing that this tacit act of recognition for the US-backed regime on Taiwan had a provocative and warmongering character. Pelosi went even further than the Trump administration in stoking up US-China tensions.

Despite this record of utterly conventional Democratic Party politics—all-out support for the profit system and US militarism combined with identity politics—Pelosi continued to be a hate figure for the Republican Party. Nearly all Republican representatives boycotted the session of the House of Representatives where it was known beforehand that she would announce her decision whether to remain as Democratic leader. This included Republican leader Kevin McCarthy, who is likely to replace Pelosi as House speaker in January.

The *New York Times* reported that, as part of his successful campaign for reelection as Republican leader, McCarthy promised a group of ultra-right Republican representatives, including fascist Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, that he would support an investigation into Pelosi’s role in the prosecution and imprisonment of those who attacked the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Greene has described the arrested and jailed members of the January 6 fascist mob as “political prisoners.” She also had previously declared on social media that “a bullet to the head” would be better than any election in removing Pelosi from power. In 2019, she said Pelosi was “guilty of treason ... a crime punishable by death.”

These comments led to Greene’s being stripped of all committee assignments by the Democratic leadership of the House. McCarthy has said he will restore Greene to committee positions, reportedly including a seat on the House Oversight Committee, where, she said, Republicans “will be investigating and holding people accountable. There’s a lot of traitors and criminals that need to be held accountable.”

While the fascists escalate their threats of violence and retaliation, Senator Bernie Sanders, who served with Pelosi in the House of Representatives for 16 years, issued a statement that simply underscores his political unseriousness and distance from any genuine struggle to defend democratic rights and oppose the billionaires whom Pelosi served throughout her career. He tweeted his thanks for Pelosi’s “years of dedicated service. Speaker of the House is no easy job and you should be proud of how much you have accomplished for the American people.”



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