

Trump, Democrats, media mourn right-wing warmonger Lindsey Graham

Patrick Martin
12 July 2026

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who died suddenly Saturday at the age of 71, was a right-wing war hawk who was a vocal advocate of American imperialist aggression from Afghanistan and Iraq to Ukraine and Iran. His death came less than 24 hours after a long plane flight from the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, where he met with President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Graham's strident advocacy of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine accounts in part for the adulatory tone of the media coverage of his death and the effusive remarks of Democratic senators and congressmen. Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal urged the Senate to pass the bipartisan sanctions bill against Russia which he and Graham co-sponsored, as a tribute to the late four-term senator from South Carolina.

There was virtually no acknowledgement in the media coverage of Graham's role as the successor in the Senate to Strom Thurmond, the Democrat turned Republican who built his political career on the defense of Jim Crow segregation. Graham did not come of age until after the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s, but he worked closely with Thurmond after he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1994. When Thurmond retired in 2003, at the age of 100, Graham positioned himself in the Republican primary as Thurmond's logical successor and won easily. He never criticized, let alone repudiated, Thurmond's long history of race-baiting and support for the Ku Klux Klan.

While in the House, Graham's best-known action was to serve as one of the House impeachment managers in the trial of President Bill Clinton before the US Senate. His denunciations of Clinton for lying about a private sexual affair contrast sharply with his later defense of the world-class liar and serial abuser of women who now occupies the White House.

In domestic policy, Graham stood out mainly for his longevity, rising to become chairman of the Senate

Judiciary Committee. He was a pivotal defender of all three Trump nominees to the Supreme Court: Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. As chairman, he pushed through the confirmation of Coney Barrett weeks before the 2020 election.

In 2025, Graham became chair of the Senate Budget Committee and played the main role in pushing through what Trump called his "One Big Beautiful Bill," a massive tax cut for the wealthy which slashed \$1 trillion over ten years from Medicaid and nearly \$200 billion from food stamps. Among the states hardest-hit by these cuts is South Carolina, one of the poorest states, mired in political and social backwardness.

But Graham's main political role was as an incessant advocate of imperialist war. He formed a partnership with Republican Senator John McCain and Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman, traveling the world as the "Three Amigos" to bolster US military allies like Israel, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Pakistan and Colombia. He was ready to praise any bloodstained dictatorship as a thriving democracy, so long as it was allied to Washington.

While his career in Congress began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a vitriolic anticommunism was the basis of his foreign policy orientation, which transmuted into hostility to Russia and China. He was commissioned as an Air Force judge advocate (military lawyer) in 1982, at the height of the Cold War, serving 33 years in the Air Force and its reserve components, including reserve duty stints in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While intransigent towards the perceived enemies of American capitalism overseas, Graham was nothing if not flexible in his approach to the fascist enemies of American democracy at home, in particular Donald Trump.

Graham launched a presidential campaign in June 2015 but ended it in December of that year without having gained any significant support, going on to endorse first

Jeb Bush and then Ted Cruz. But he was then a sharp-tongued critic of Trump, calling him, accurately enough, a “race-baiting, xenophobic, religious bigot.”

Trump responded in kind, at one point reading out Graham’s private cellphone number at a campaign rally so that his supporters could call the senator and vilify him. In one television interview, Graham said: “You know how you make America great again? Tell Donald Trump to go to hell.” He said flatly that Trump was unqualified to be president and voted in 2016 for third-party candidate Evan McMullin, a conservative Republican.

Once Trump entered the White House, however, Graham switched his posture almost overnight, becoming an assiduous flatterer of the new president, a legislative ally, frequent visitor to the White House and Mar-a-Lago, and an almost weekly golfing partner.

Graham fully supported Trump’s refusal to admit his loss of the 2020 presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden, and he directly assisted Trump’s efforts to overturn the vote. He called Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, suggesting that he reject mail-in votes from certain counties with “questionable” signatures. He was recommended for indictment by the special grand jury, but District Attorney Fani Willis, a Democrat, declined to charge him. The broader prosecution later collapsed when a state appeals court removed Willis and her Republican-appointed successor dropped all charges in November 2025.

After the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol, Graham pretended to break with Trump, declaring, “Count me out. Enough is enough.” But he voted against convicting Trump after he was impeached by the House for instigating the attack, and later said, “Can we move forward without President Trump? The answer is no.” When Trump returned to the White House in January 2025, Graham resumed his role as one of the most disgusting courtiers of the would-be dictator-president.

Commentary on the Sunday morning television talk shows treated Graham as a political giant and an intransigent defender of freedom and democracy. After Trump phoned in to several of the talk shows to pay tribute to Graham, Democrats like Senator Adam Schiff and former Democratic National Committee chair Donna Brazile chimed in with their own praise.

Both former president Biden and former vice president Kamala Harris issued their own tributes.

Biden’s statement said, “Lindsey and I served together in Congress for over a decade, and worked closely on many issues throughout the years. We traveled the world

together as members of the Senate Foreign Relations committee. We disagreed often, and sometimes loudly [but] Lindsey and I did agree on the profound importance of public service. Like me, he loved the Senate as an institution, even with all its flaws and complexities.”

Harris wrote on social media, “I am saddened to learn of the passing of my former colleague, Senator Lindsey Graham. He was full of wit, energy, and charm, and he cared deeply about the Senate and the people of South Carolina. Doug and I are sending our thoughts and our prayers to his friends and loved ones.”

Biden and Harris, and their Democratic colleagues in Congress, praise this political hack who was a relentless advocate of US military aggression, and who deliberately aligned himself with the fascist president once he saw which way the wind was blowing in the Republican Party.

That only demonstrates that there is no fundamental difference between the two capitalist parties, that, as President Obama declared after Trump’s victory in 2016, the election was an “intramural scrimmage” between two sides that are on the same team—the team of American capitalism, of the billionaires and the military-intelligence apparatus.

The adulation in official Washington stands in stark contrast to the response among the broader public, where the news of Graham’s death has been met with a mixture of indifference and open hostility. On social media, most of the commentary centered on the wars Graham championed and the millions of lives they destroyed. Among some, there may be a sentiment that Saturday’s sudden events will improve the state of American politics, if only slightly.

This, however, would be to vastly overstate Graham’s individual significance. The oligarchy that elevated him can easily replace him with another reactionary nonentity. What his career demonstrates is not the power of one man but the character of the political system that produced him, one in which decades of service to militarism and reaction are the qualification for the tributes now being showered upon him by both capitalist parties.



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