Newly elected members of Congress attend orientation

BY LISA MASCARO
AP congressional correspondent



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO BY JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON

Sens.-elect Abdul El-Sayed, D-Mich., center; Roy Cooper, D-N.C., third from right; and Annie Andrews, D-S.C., second from right, walk through the Ohio Clock Corridor on Monday at the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

WASHINGTON – Rep.-elect LaKesha Womack, a community organizer who stunned her own Democratic Party by defeating a well-known North Carolina Republican on her shoestring $56,000 campaign budget, said she's excited to arrive in Washington and show what's possible.

Rep.-elect Brian Poindexter said his win over incumbent GOP Rep. Max Miller ensures Ohio remains a very competitive swing state.

And Rebecca Bennett, a former Navy helicopter pilot in New Jersey who said she's spent her whole life "trying to find the biggest, hardest problem to throw myself at," was ready to give Congress a try. "There's always the unknown."

They were among more than 100 newly elected members of Congress arriving in Washington this week for the start of freshmen orientation — the crush of new Democrats, many bringing a new sense of urgency after the party's sweep of the midterm elections, and the slim new class of freshmen Republicans.

"People were just looking for somebody who's going to listen to them," said Womack, who said she won by simply showing up and talking with voters.

"I'm a single mom and so I know what it's like to have to live on a budget and figure out how am I going to feed my family," she said. "And that's what people want to fight for them in Washington right now."

New-member orientation creates an unusual mashup on Capitol Hill, as the newcomers are arriving and the exiting lawmakers begin to clear out, all in preparation for the peaceful transfer of power on Jan. 3, when lawmakers are sworn in and the new Congress begins.

This week's orientation includes training sessions and ritzy receptions for the newcomers, and for the defeated or those retiring it's the start of figuring out what's next. Briefing rooms are filled with information about office setup, payroll and benefits, and there's a room to take official portraits.

It's also the time for the House and Senate to hold internal party elections for their new leaders, ahead of a public vote in January for the speaker of the House.

"I'm looking forward to learning as much as I can and being the best representative I can be for my district," said Poindexter as he arrived at the nearby Navy Yard hotel where lawmakers converged.

The Capitol was a changed place as the members-elect started meeting up with their colleagues and getting to know their way around the place.

Sen.-elect Abdul El-Sayed, of Michigan, was swarmed by young people in the Capitol basement, taking pictures with the progressive star who is also the first Muslim in the Senate.

Texas Sen.-elect James Talarico paid a visit to the outgoing Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn, who lost his own primary for reelection. President Donald Trump backed Cornyn's rival, Ken Paxton, who was defeated.

"I'm so grateful for his advice and his guidance as I try to fill his big shoes," Talarico said of Cornyn as he walked through the Senate between orientation events. He said he wants to meet with Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas as well.

And Sen.-elect Juliana Stratton, of Illinois, snapped a photo with new Democratic senators-elect including Talarico, El-Sayed, Annie Andrews, Roy Cooper, Peggy Flanagan, Josh Turek and others.

Among them was former Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown, who defeated Republican Sen. Jon Husted, a Trump-backed favorite, for a comeback. Brown was in the Senate for 18 years before he lost two years ago to GOP Sen. Bernie Moreno, but he still joined his freshmen colleagues for their orientation.

"I've actually learned some things," said Brown, who was celebrating his 74th birthday on Monday. "I've gotten to know my colleagues."

One of the first decisions the incoming lawmakers will make happens even before they're sworn into office, as they huddle with their parties in private meetings to choose House and Senate leadership.

Congressional offices are being bombarded with phone calls and social media messages pushing Democrats to dump their current choices — House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer — in favor of a fresh start.

Jeffries scoffed when questioned Monday if he had support — the typically low-key leader flashing confidence he would have the votes. He is on track to make history as the nation's first Black American to become speaker of the House.

Progressive lawmakers, in particular, are agitating for change reflective of voters' sweeping turnout for Democrats, especially in the Senate. Sens. Bernie Sanders, of Vermont; and Elissa Slotkin, of Michigan, announced they would not support Schumer.

Sen.-elect Chris Pappas, D-N.H. — who was darting back and forth between his day job as an outgoing member of the House and his new one as an incoming senator — said their class is "a new generation of leadership that wants to do things differently and shake up Washington."

He said he wants to meet with Schumer and will later decide who he will support, if anyone challenges him.

Republicans chose their new leaders after House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Benton, decided to step aside following the party's election defeat. Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan won the race against the No. 2 Republican Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, to become the minority leader, continuing a rivalry stretching to 2023, before Johnson rose to power.

Senate Republicans tapped Sen. John Thune, of South Dakota, to stay on as leader,

Kennedy family members seek to block arch

BY JONATHAN J. COOPER
Associated Press

Nine family members of the Kennedy political dynasty asked a judge Tuesday to block President Donald Trump's plan to build a towering memorial arch, saying the 250-foot structure would cast a shadow over their relatives' gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery.

The shadow would "fundamentally alter the experience of visiting the gravesites," the relatives argued. They filed a motion to intervene in two existing lawsuits seeking to block construction of the arch.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan last week prohibited the Trump administration from breaking ground on the structure for 14 days.

The nine Kennedy family members who filed suit are children and grandchildren of Robert F. Kennedy and Edward M. Kennedy, brothers of the slain U.S. president John F. Kennedy, both of whom served in the U.S. Senate. They are buried close to the eternal flame that marks JFK's gravesite, a trio of memorials that are a major draw for the millions of people who visit the Arlington cemetery each year.

Voter Registration Deadline

The East Baton Rouge Parish Registrar of Voters Office announces the last day to register to vote or make changes to your voter registration for the December 12, 2026 Election is:

Thursday, November 12, 2026 by-mail or in person at the offices of the Registrar of Voters, weekdays 8:00 am until 4:30 pm.

Main Office: City Hall – 222 Saint Louis St. – Room 201
Southeast: Fire Station Building – 11010 Coursey Blvd.
Baker: Motor Vehicle Building – 2250 Main. St.

or
Saturday, November 21, 2026 for online transactions at www.GeauxVote.com

Call (225) 389-3940 for more information.

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