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.

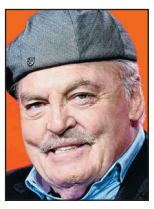
Republicans chose their new leaders after House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Benton, decided to step aside following the party's election defeat. Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan won the race against the No. 2 Republican Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, to become the minority leader, continuing a rivalry stretching to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

Senate Republicans tapped Sen. John Thune of South Dakota to stay on as leader, despite those agitating for a change.

Stacy Keach, star of stage and 'Mike Hammer' series, dies at 85

BY MARK KENNEDY
AP entertainment writer

Stacy Keach, one of America's finest stage actors who became best known for playing scruffy private eye Mike Hammer on TV and whose career was nearly derailed after he was imprisoned in 1984 for trying to smuggle cocaine into Britain, died Tuesday. He was 85.



Keach

Keach died at home in Magdalenka, Poland, "after a long and difficult battle with a serious heart condition and heart failure," his wife, Malgosia Tomassi Keach, said in a statement. Keach had previously suffered a heart attack onstage in Chicago in June 2017.

Though he was considered a preeminent interpreter of Shakespeare and a favorite of such legendary directors as John Huston, Keach was indelibly linked with his take on the hard-boiled Hammer, the fictitious TV private detective created by crime novelist Mickey Spillane.

Unwilling to do the same thing over and over, Keach left behind a crazy quilt of roles, playing a stoner cop on film, King Lear onstage and also narrating "World's Most Amazing Videos" on TV. He played a deranged colonel in "The Ninth Configuration" (also known as "Twinkle, Twinkle Killer Kane"), led the TV show "Titus," had a role in Alexander Payne's Oscar-nominated drama "Nebraska," and played a New York archbishop in a recurring role on the CBS police drama "Blue Bloods." Last year, he had an excellent turn as George Clooney's bitter father in "Jay Kelly."

"My objective was to have as varied a selection of roles as possible. It probably did hurt my career," he told New York magazine in 2012. "My choices have had a cost attached to it. But I've gotten to play Hamlet, and Richard III, and King Lear, and I would not give that up for anything."

Actor Lou Diamond Phillips, who played Keach's son in the 2008 TV movie "Lone Rider," said in a post on X that Keach was a "consummate actor, gracious, giving and incredibly kind even while he had the presence of a smoldering volcano. One of the greats. Proud to have shared some frames with him."

He played French painter Julien Mistral in the CBS miniseries "Mistral's Daughter," a Russian prince in the miniseries version of Judith Krantz's novel "Princess Daisy," Barabbas in Franco Zeffirelli's "Jesus of Nazareth" and Maj. Jonas Steele in "The Blue and the Gray." He won a Golden Globe playing Ernest Hemingway in a six-hour miniseries, for which he gained 35 pounds.

Keach earned a Tony Award nomination for his portrayal of Buffalo Bill in the Broadway play "Indians," played Edmund opposite Lee J. Cobb in "King Lear" on Broadway and had other onstage roles there in "The Kentucky Cycle" in 1993, "The Country Wife" in 1965 and "Other Desert Cities" in 2011.

While he was still doing "Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer" (later titled "The New Mike Hammer"), Keach was arrested in 1984 at London's Heathrow Airport after trying to smuggle 1.3 ounces of cocaine concealed in an aerosol shaving cream can and elsewhere in his luggage. Also arrested was his secretary.

"As my sentence was read — nine months in prison — I felt like someone had kicked

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.

Building the arch would be a "permanent denigration" of the gravesites, and the Kennedy offspring "would never again be able to appreciate both sites as they always have before, and as the Kennedy family always intended," lawyers for the relatives wrote.



