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By: TA | AP Brief

The Democratic Party's senators in the race for majority leader



The Democratic Party's incoming senators haven't even been sworn into office yet, but the decision over who will lead their new majority is already testing the promise of change they made as candidates.

The 13 new Democrats are part of the largest incoming Senate class in decades, with several winning in Republican strongholds by promising to shake up Washington and be independent voices.

Now they are caught up in a classic insider fight, forced to decide whether to stick with longtime Senate leader Chuck Schumer of New York or back challenger Chris Van Hollen of Maryland.

Newly elected progressives, including Abdul El-Sayed of Michigan and Peggy Flanagan of Minnesota, have backed Van Hollen, who is taking on Schumer with promises of a more aggressive legislative approach.

Sen.-elect Sherrod Brown of Ohio, who is returning to Washington after losing his seat in 2024, supports Schumer.

But the incoming senators from traditionally Republican states such as Texas, Mississippi, Iowa and South Carolina, whose victories helped deliver Democrats the majority, have so far largely avoided taking sides publicly.

Annie Andrews of South Carolina has said she is talking with both candidates. Scott Colom of Mississippi says he wants to get to know them better before deciding and describes himself as being in "listening mode."

Kansas Sen.-elect Adam Hamilton said Thursday he would not back Schumer, but declined to endorse anyone.

"I'm looking for someone who is going to bring people together," Hamilton told MSNow. "Right now, in places like Kansas, there's a lot of people who don't feel that in Chuck Schumer."

The Dec. 1 vote will be held by secret ballot

Schumer's long-standing relationships and knowledge of Senate machinery are a big advantage heading into the Dec. 1 vote, which will be held by secret ballot.

He also oversees Senate Democrats' campaign spending group, funneling millions into many of the races and, in some cases, recruiting the candidates to run in the first place.

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But the reluctance of many incoming senators to commit has put an unusual spotlight on first-term lawmakers who could help shape the party's direction in the new Congress.

"We should be very embracing of the new people who have been through fire to get here," said Hawaii Sen. Mazie Hirono, who is supporting Schumer. "We have to make sure that all these voices are heard, and they've got a lot of talent to bring to the table."