



Newly elected and incoming GOP Majority Leader Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) speaks to the media after the Senate Republican leadership election in Washington on Nov. 13, 2024. Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times

## PREMIUM REPORTS

# *5 Things to Know About John Thune, the Next Senate Majority Leader*

Thune said he got into politics thanks to his high school basketball days.

🔗 33

💬 59

▶ Play

🔖 Save

By Jackson Richman, Jacob Burg | November 13, 2024 Updated: November 13, 2024

Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) was elected by his Republican colleagues on Nov. 13 to be Senate Majority Leader, succeeding Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

Thune, 63, has been married to his wife, Kimberley Weems, for four decades. They have two daughters and five grandchildren. His hobbies include hunting pheasant and running, according to his Senate [website](#).

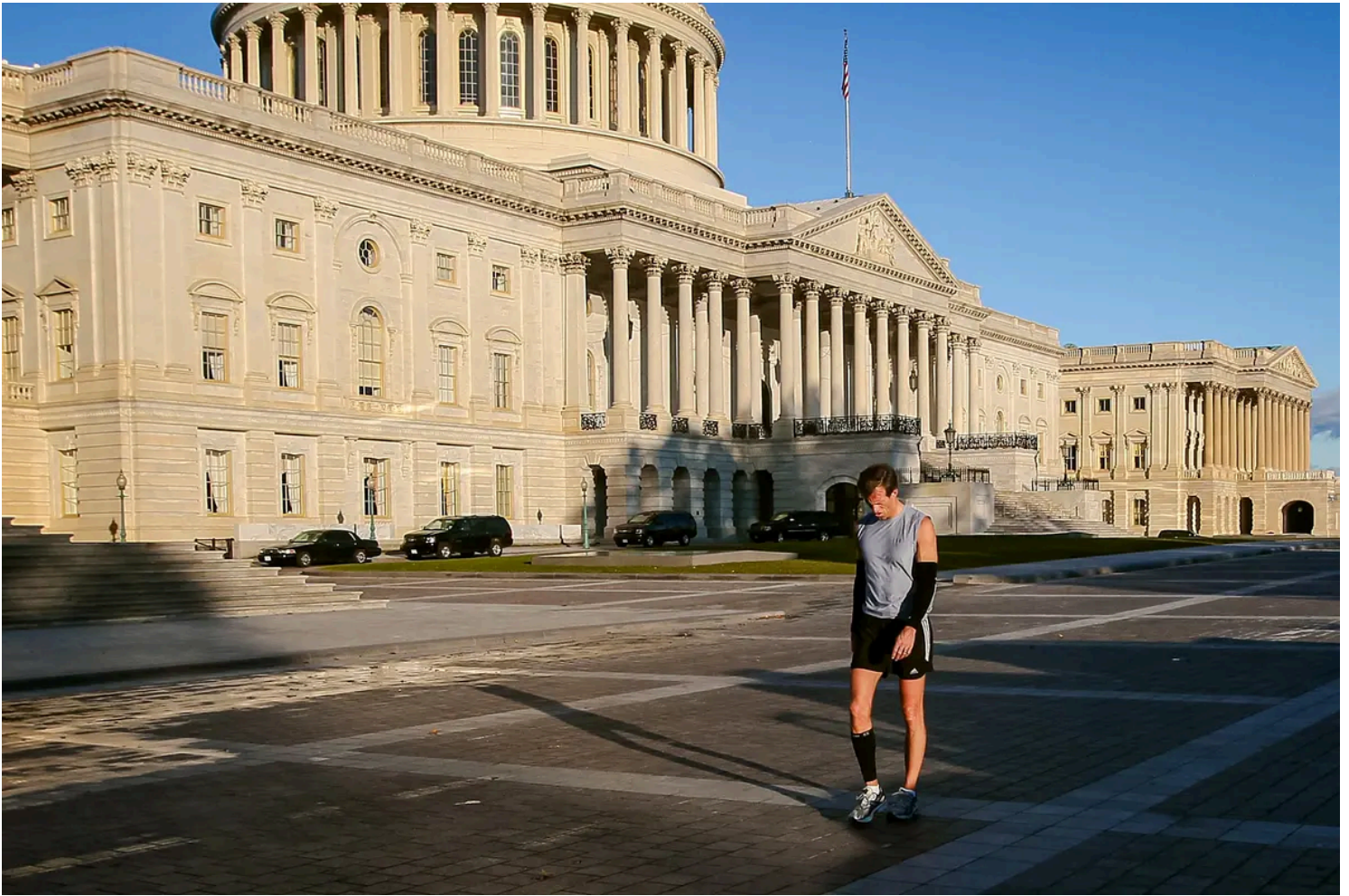
Below are six things to know about the next leader of the Senate and Senate GOP conference.

## **1. Basketball Inspired His Political Career**

In a video posted to the social media platform X in March, Thune, 63, recalls getting into politics thanks to his high school basketball days.

He played as a freshman on the varsity team at Jones County High School in Murdo, South Dakota.

After a basketball game in 1976, he was at a department store when someone tapped him on the shoulder and reminded him that he had missed one of the six free throws he attempted. The person was Rep. Jim Abdnor (R-S.D.).



Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) jogs on the plaza of the U.S. Capitol on Nov. 17, 2010. Mark Wilson/Getty Images

“He kind of started following my sports career. I started paying more attention to politics. And when I got out of grad school, I get a call from his office,” Thune said. “And by then he’s in the Senate and offering me a job out here, so my wife and I were like ‘Eh, we’ll do this for a year or two.’”

He ended up working with Abdnor for 4 1/2 years.

## **2. Has Served in the Senate for Nearly 2 Decades**

Thune has been in the Senate since 2005 after upsetting Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) in the 2004 election. Thune won by a margin of 1.16 percent. The senator ran unopposed in 2010,

winning reelection with 100 percent of the vote. When Thune was up for reelection in 2016, he prevailed with more than 70 percent of support, and won by a similar margin in 2022.

### Premium Picks

---



Tracking Every Trump Cabinet Pick



9 Things to Know About Elise Stefanik, Trump's Pick for UN Ambassador

In addition to serving as Senate minority whip, Thune has served as chair of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, which sets the agenda for the conference, the chair of the Senate Republican Conference, and the Senate majority whip.

Between 2015 and 2019, he was chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee.

Thune has a history of being critical of President-elect Donald Trump.

“What former President Trump did to undermine faith in our election system and disrupt the peaceful transfer of power is inexcusable,” he said in 2021, referring to Trump’s challenges of the 2020 election results and suggesting Trump played a role in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol.



Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), flanked by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), speaks during a press conference in Baghdad, Iraq, on Dec. 14, 2006. Sabah Arar/AFP via Getty Images

The comment was made in a [statement](#) in which Thune announced his decision to vote to acquit Trump in his second impeachment trial, but only because the president was out of office by then.

Thune [said](#) efforts to challenge the 2020 election results would “go down like a shot dog.”

### **3. Lost First Senate Race by 524 Votes**

Thune ran for Senate in 2002 but lost to incumbent Sen. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) by just 524 votes.

After Johnson died in October, Thune issued a statement.

“Known for his tenacity and work ethic, Tim was a steadfast leader who dedicated his life to serving the people of South Dakota with integrity and compassion,” he said in an Oct. 9 statement. “He fought tirelessly for rural America and leaves a legacy that will have a lasting impact for years to come.”

Before the Senate, Thune was in the House, representing South Dakota’s at-large district between 1997 and 2003.

## 4. Supported Tim Scott for President

In a December 2022 [interview](#) with The Washington Post, when asked if he would support Trump were he to become the GOP presidential nominee in 2024, Thune said he hoped there would be “other options.”

Thune initially endorsed Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.) in the 2024 GOP presidential primary.

“I think he’d be a great candidate. I’m excited about it. I’ve been encouraging him,” Thune [told](#) The Hill in April 2023. “I think he’s getting a lot of encouragement from his colleagues. He’s really well thought of and respected and I think he’d be a really interesting candidate for president.”

A few months after Scott dropped out the following November, Thune endorsed Trump.

“The primary results in South Carolina make clear that Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee for president in this year’s pivotal presidential election. The choice before the American people is crystal clear: It’s Donald Trump or Joe Biden,” he [told](#) Fox News.



President Donald Trump hosts a working lunch with members of Congress, including (L–R) White House Director of Legislative Affairs Mark Short, Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Ark), Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), and Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) at the White House on June 13, 2017. Mike Theiler-Pool/Getty Images

## 5. Long History in Politics

Thune began his decades-long career in Washington, D.C., as a staffer for then-Sen. Jim Abdnor (R-S.D.) before he joined the Small Business Administration during former President Ronald Reagan's administration.

Thune then became executive director of the South Dakota Republican Party in 1989 when he returned to the Mount Rushmore State after working for Abdnor.

Former South Dakota Gov. George S. Mickelson, a Republican, appointed Thune to serve as Railroad Director of the state from 1991

to 1993. From 1993 to 1996, he was executive director of the South Dakota Municipal League, which is “a nonpartisan, nonprofit association of incorporated municipalities in South Dakota” that seeks to improve cooperation among municipal governments in the state, according to the group’s [website](#).

Thune ran against then-Lieutenant Gov. Carole Hillard in the Republican primary for South Dakota’s lone U.S. House seat in 1996. After trailing Hillard significantly in polling, Thune won the primary by a margin of 18 percent, before defeating his Democratic challenger 58–37 percent.

“I won’t forget that the tax dollars you pay to the government isn’t their money. It’s your money. No matter how hard it tries, government can never be a substitute for personal initiative, and it can never take the place of the family,” Thune said on election night in 1996.

He was reelected to South Dakota’s at-large congressional district in 1998 and 2000, with more than 70 percent of the total vote each time.

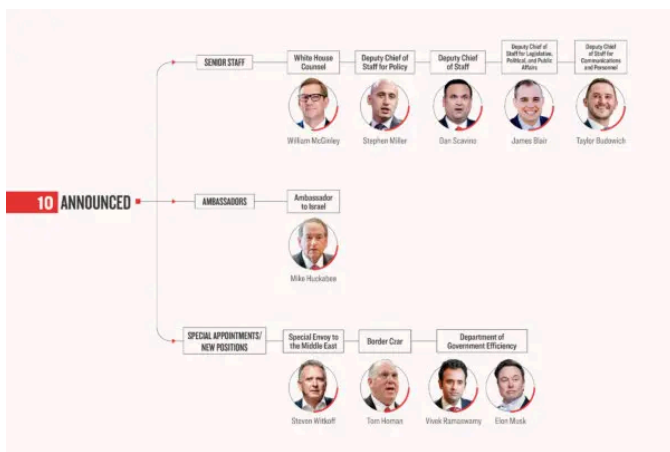




Vice President Kamala Harris swears in Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), as his wife, Kimberly Thune, looks on, in the old senate chamber for the Ceremonial Swearing in Washington on Jan. 3, 2023. Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images

**More Premium Reports**

[See More](#)



**Tracking Trump's Non-Cabinet, High Level Appointments**



**Trump Picks Rubio, Longtime China Hawk, for Secretary of State**



**Tracking Every Trump Cabinet Pick**



**8 Things to Know About Tom Homan, Trump's New Border Czar**



**9 Things to Know About Elise Stefanik, Trump's Pick for UN Ambassador**



**What to Expect From Trump's First Day in Office**



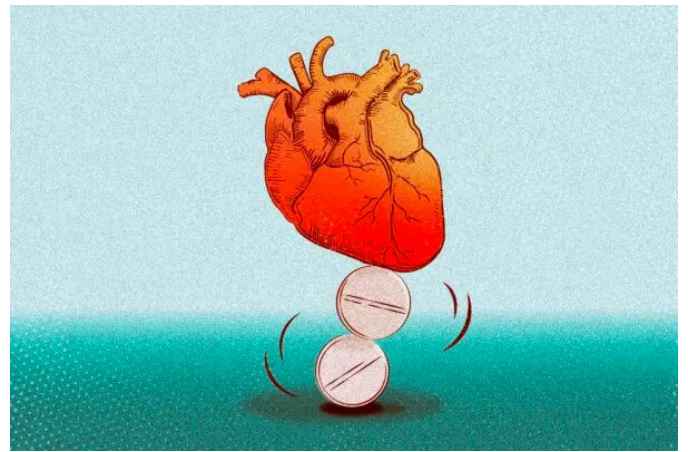
**How a 2nd Trump Term Could Affect US Production, Prices, and Investments**



**'Forever Chemicals' in US Drinking Water: A Growing Problem**



**School Districts That Spent COVID-19 Money on Hiring Now Grapple With Layoffs**



**Aspirin, Remarkable for Preventing Heart Attacks, Is Not for Everyone**

Copyright © 2000 - 2024 The Epoch Times Association Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Cookies Settings](#)