

Kernan to resign from NM Senate

- [By Alex Ross Roswell Daily Record](#)
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Following more than two decades of representing parts of Chaves, Lea and Eddy counties, Sen. Gay Kernan (R-Hobbs) announced her intention to resign from the New Mexico Legislature.

“After much prayerful consideration and with the help of my family, I have made the difficult decision to resign my seat as New Mexico State Senator for District 42, effective August 1, 2023,” Kernan said in a statement Wednesday.

Kernan, who is now in her fifth term, cited family obligations as a factor in her decision to step down before the end of her four-year term. All 42 seats in the New Mexico Senate will be on the ballot in November 2024.

“I think the time has come for me to consider my family and just sort of take care of my family and myself at this point,” Kernan said to the Roswell Daily Record Wednesday following her announcement.



Kernan said she began considering leaving the Senate before she ran for re-election in 2020, but says that things in her life were different then and there were several issues that she wanted to work on in the Legislature.

The veteran lawmaker says that she knows leaving the Legislature before the end of her current term presents difficulties, but believes such action is now necessary.

Carol Parrish, chair of the Republican Party of Lea County, called Kernan “a wonderful senator for our county and our state,” and said her possible retirement was anticipated.

“We knew it was a possibility,” Parrish said. “It's hard to lose someone of her caliber, but we know she has plans for her life and is looking forward to a new adventure. We'll be with her every step and are praying for her success.”

A retired educator, Kernan herself was appointed to the seat she now holds in 2002 by Gov. Gary Johnson to finish the unexpired term of then Sen. Shirley Bailey (R-Hobbs). During that time, she ran unopposed in the strongly Republican district, which now includes most of northern Lea County, a portion of Eddy County and a single sparsely populated Chaves County precinct.

As a lawmaker, Kernan is the top Republican on the Senate Tax, Business, and Transportation Committee, and is a member of the Senate Education Committee. She is also on the Legislative Education Study Committee and is an advisory member of the Revenue Stabilization and Tax Policy Committee.

Throughout her 21 years in office, Kernan has focused heavily on education and healthcare, sponsoring or co-sponsoring some 258 pieces of legislation.

But she says it is not all about getting bills signed into law.

“My biggest joy comes from receiving a call from a constituent that might need a little bit of help reaching a department or resolving an issue related to the state, and that has always been the part that I've really enjoyed,” Kernan explained.

The governor will next be tasked with selecting a replacement for the Senate District 42 seat.

Under New Mexico law, when there is a vacancy in a Senate district, each of the county boards of commissions within the district will submit a name of one individual to fill the seat. Names chosen by each commission are submitted to the governor, who chooses the replacement to fill out the remainder of the Senate term.

Before Kernan declared her intention to step down as senator, there was speculation that area legislators state Reps. Larry Scott (R-Hobbs) and Randall Pettigrew (R-Lovington) might be eyeing a run for the seat if Kernan was to retire.

Hours after Kernan issued the statement, Scott, an engineer who was first elected to the New Mexico House of Representatives, confirmed that he will submit his name to the Chaves, Eddy and Lea County Boards of Commissioners for consideration. He will then file to run for a full Senate term in November 2024.

Per figures from the 2020 census, the district is home to 51,154 residents and has Republicans with a significant edge.

Numbers from the New Mexico Secretary of State's Office indicate that as of May 31, 60% of the District's voters are registered Republicans. That is compared to 17% registered as Democrats, 1% as Libertarians and 21% registered either with a minor party or no political party.

So far, Kernan is the fourth senator to publicly disclose they will not seek re-election next year. The others are Sens. Gerald Ortiz y Pino (D-Albuquerque), Mark Moores (R-Albuquerque) and Cliff Pirtle (R-Roswell) have publicly stated they will not be running for re-election.