

Trump's Grip on GOP Solidifies with MAGA Leadership

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ATLANTA, Once seen as an outsider by Republican power brokers, Donald Trump has now firmly reshaped the Republican National Committee (RNC) into an extension of his populist “America First” movement. From the convention halls of Milwaukee to this week’s party meeting in Atlanta, loyalists have cemented control, signaling that the GOP is unlikely to return to its pre-Trump establishment roots.

Amy Kremer, an early Tea Party activist and Trump backer, is one example of this shift. After a failed congressional run in Georgia, she helped organize the 2021 rally near the White House before the Capitol riot. Today, she holds an RNC seat, where she recently helped elect Trump ally Joe Gruters of Florida as the party's new chairman. Gruters, described by Trump as a "MAGA warrior," reflects the president's dominance inside the party. "It's Donald Trump's party now," Kremer said.

Republican officials describe a level of unity between the White House and party machinery that far surpasses Trump's first term. Nearly a dozen RNC members interviewed point to grassroots energy, working-class support, and a deep loyalty that they believe will carry through the 2026 midterms. Nevada GOP chairman Michael McDonald put it bluntly: "Donald Trump brought something that needed to wake up the party, and he did. And it's never going back."

Trump's relationship with the Republican Party was not always this secure. In 2016, figures such as Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz opposed him, while establishment leaders like Ronna Romney McDaniel, his first RNC chair, often represented skeptical factions. Despite those early divisions, Trump and his allies steadily built state-level infrastructure, bringing in loyalists such as Susie Wiles and David Bossie to recruit candidates and strengthen local party leadership.

That long-term groundwork is now paying off. Younger leaders like John Wahl of Alabama and Bryan Miller of Wyoming embody a new generation inspired by Trump rather than traditional party elites. Wahl, elected as Alabama's state chairman in his thirties, said Trump tapped into frustrations with "the status quo and being politically correct."

Not every Republican is fully aligned on policy, particularly on issues like foreign trade and military use in domestic crises. Still, the prevailing consensus is that Trump's combative style resonates with voters. Florida GOP chair Evan Power said bluntly, "Now people know that his fighting style is what wins elections."

The practical impact of Trump's dominance can be seen in leadership reshuffles. After forcing McDaniel's resignation in 2024, Trump installed loyalists, including daughter-in-law Lara Trump and North Carolina's Michael Whatley, as co-chairs. Whatley is now running for Senate with Trump's backing, while Vice President JD Vance oversees RNC fundraising operations, creating an unusually direct connection between the White House and the party's financial apparatus.

Even among those who voice concerns about spending and debt, such as Kremer, there is acknowledgment that Trump is delivering on priorities that matter most to the base, especially border enforcement and immigration control. “There’s not another person that would deport the illegals and shut down the border,” Kremer said.

With each turnover in party leadership, Trump’s influence grows deeper. His supporters argue that his years out of office provided the time to refine strategy. As Florida’s Power put it, “He sat in exile for four years and thought about what he could have done better, and he’s executing on all cylinders.”