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# Blackburns’s Senate seat choice

## What happens if she becomes governor?

**Vivian Jones**  
Nashville Tennessean  
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Republican gubernatorial nominee Marsha Blackburn has said that if elected in November, she intends to remain in the U.S. Senate until her inauguration in January, enabling her to personally choose who fills her Senate seat.

Whenever there’s a vacancy in one of Tennessee’s U.S. Senate seats, the state constitution allows the governor to choose a person to fill the seat until the next statewide general election — which for Blackburn’s seat will be in 2028. If Blackburn was elected governor and then resigned her seat before her inauguration, Gov. Bill Lee would make the pick.

Republicans are seeking to defend their razor-thin Senate majority during midterm elections this year. President Donald Trump will likely weigh in on who should replace Blackburn. Blackburn has remained in office while campaigning for Tennessee governor and told the Nashville Banner earlier this month that she would remain in the Senate until her inauguration, giving herself the power to choose her replacement.

**Who would Blackburn pick?**  
  
With Blackburn a favorite in the governor’s race since before she announced her bid, speculation has swirled about who will take her place. Three names are considered to be top contenders: U.S. Rep. Tim Burchett of Knoxville, former CoreCivic CEO and major Republican donor Damon  
  
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# Bonnaroo won’t return next year

**Audrey Gibbs**  
Nashville Tennessean  
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Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival will not return in 2027, organizers have announced. The Manchester, Tennessee, festival shared it will be taking a year off following their successful 2026 festival, and 2025 mid-festival cancellation. In a social media post, festival organizers said the Farm, particularly its main venue, needed a year off after back-to-back years of storms. “This wasn’t an easy decision, and not one we take lightly, but in our hearts, we know this break will only make Bonnaroo better,” the post read. “We hope you’ll continue radiating positivity in your community throughout the year and thank you for loving this festival as much as we do.”

The announcement comes after days of rumors among fans and industry observers, who were curious about the future of Tennessee’s largest music festival — fueled in part by the absence of a date announcement. Bonnaroo’s decision follows a turbulent period for the festival. In 2021, organizers called off Bonnaroo before the festival began due to remnant rainfall from Hurricane Ida swamping the grounds. Bonnaroo was canceled again mid-event in 2025 when heavy rainfall flooded The Farm, making conditions unsafe for attendees. Bonnaroo 2026 largely proceeded as planned, featuring headlining performances from Skrillex, The Strokes, RÜFÜS DU SOL and Noah Kahan. Organizers invested millions in infrastructure improvements before Bonnaroo returned this year, though attendees still encountered muddy  
  
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Prosecutor Will Ayers speaks during a hearing for Christa Gail Pike in Knox County Criminal Court in Knoxville, Tenn., on Aug. 11. Pike is set to be executed Sept. 30 for the 1995 murder of Colleen Slemmer, in which Pike saved a piece of Slemmer's skull as a souvenir. BRIANNA PACIORKA/NEWS SENTINEL

# Christa Pike did not prevail after special master hearing

**Keith Sharon**  
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Most of the challenges argued by Christa Pike’s legal team during a hearing in Knoxville have been dismissed. Senior Judge Mark Ward, a special master appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court, presided during the three-day hearing that ended just before noon on Aug. 13. In a report filed Aug. 20, Ward found that Pike failed to show that

lethal injection, the scheduled method of execution, would cause her needless suffering. Attorneys for the state and for Pike will be able to lodge challenges until Aug. 28. The state plans to execute Pike Sept. 30.  
  
**Pike attended the hearing via video**  
  
Journalists from The Tennessean, the Knoxville News Sentinel and other

media outlets were in the courtroom at Knoxville Criminal Court, but Pike was not. Her image was streamed from the Debra K. Johnson Rehabilitation Center, where she has been imprisoned for more than 30 years. Pike sat at a long conference table in a light blue long prison-issue top. In the minutes before the hearing, she smiled and waved at one of her attorneys.  
  
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