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After the second session of the 115th Congress began on January 3, 2018, two new members were sworn into the Senate – Doug Jones (D-AL) and Tina Smith (D-MN) – bringing the party numbers to 51 Republicans, 47 Democrats, and 2 Independents. After a surprise victory in the special election held last year, Senator Jones replaced Republican predecessor Luther Strange who had been appointed by the Governor of Alabama to continue the term vacated by now-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Senator Smith was appointed by the governor of Minnesota to replace Al Franken who resigned on January 2 after accusations of sexual harassment.

The loss of one Republican senator resulted in renegotiation of committee panel ratios and subsequent assignments. There is now a one-vote margin separating the majority and minority for each committee, except the Judiciary Committee which has a two-vote margin. Senator Smith took former Senator Franken's seat on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, while Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) also rejoined the panel, filling the seat vacated by former Senator Strange. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) left the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee – which is now joined by Senator Smith and Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE) – to join the Environment and Public Works Committee. Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) left the Environmental and Public Works Committee to join the Judiciary Committee. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) also joined the Judiciary Committee after leaving the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, which is now joined by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT). Additionally, Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) took over as ranking member of the Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard Subcommittee.

House committee assignments have also shifted in the second session. House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX-1) announced the appointments of Representative Ralph Abraham (R-LA-5) as chairman of the Oversight Subcommittee, Representative Clay Higgins (R-LA-3) as vice chairman of the Oversight Subcommittee, and Representative Roger Marshall (R-KS-1) as vice chairman of the Research and Technology Subcommittee. Additionally, Representative John Curtis (R-UT-3) joined the Natural Resources Committee to serve on the Subcommittees for Energy and Mineral Resources and Federal Lands.

More than 30 Republicans and 15 Democrats so far have announced they will not be seeking re-election in the House in the 2018 midterm elections due to retirement or running for other offices. Several contenders are vying for retiring Representative Smith's position as head of the Science Committee, following his announcement last November. Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ-11) and Oversight Committee Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-SC-4) announced their retirement plans at the end of January, leaving these powerful committee positions open as well.

Sources: E&E News; Library of Congress; U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce; U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources; U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
