

Congressional Republicans move to purge Liz Cheney from leadership

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The Republican Party in the House of Representatives is moving decisively to purge Representative Liz Cheney, the third-ranking member of the leadership, over her continued denunciation of Donald Trump's claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

On Tuesday, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy made it clear on Fox News that he had "lost confidence" in Cheney. And on Wednesday, House Minority Whip Steve Scalise, the second-ranking Republican, called for Cheney's removal and threw his support to Representative Elise Stefanik of New York, one of the main defenders of Trump during two impeachment trials.

The next meeting of the Republican House Conference is next Wednesday, May 12, and if any member demands a vote, there will be a secret ballot that Cheney is certain to lose. A second ballot would then choose her replacement in the congressional leadership.

Cheney is a diehard reactionary with a long record of advocating imperialist war and repression, going back to her years as a Fox News commentator, after her father Dick Cheney completed his term as vice president. She was particularly vitriolic in her opposition to individuals like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, who exposed the crimes of American imperialism.

She has become a target today because she has vociferously opposed the claim by Trump that the 2020 election was stolen and held him responsible for the violent attack on Congress on January 6 by Trump supporters seeking to block the certification of the electoral votes that gave Joe Biden his victory. She was one of 10 House Republicans, who voted to impeach Trump for his role on January 6.

In February, McCarthy opposed an effort to remove Cheney as chair of the House Republican Conference, and she won a secret ballot vote easily, by a margin of better than two to one. Since then, however, Trump has consolidated his grip on the Republican Party, at both the state and national levels.

There is, of course, a certain irony in Liz Cheney being removed because she will not go along with what she called Trump's "big lie" about the 2020 elections. Through her father, she is forever associated with a previous "big lie," the claim by Vice President Cheney and President George W. Bush that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction," which justified their invasion and occupation of the country in 2003.

But the Republican Party has moved so far to the right that it is likely to remove Cheney from the congressional leadership, while Trump supporters in Wyoming are mounting a well-financed campaign to oust Cheney from her seat in Congress altogether, by defeating her in the Republican primary next year.

Cheney addressed the basic issue underlying the campaign to remove her in an op-ed column in the *Washington Post* published on its website Wednesday night, and in its Thursday print edition, under the headline, "The GOP is at a turning point. History is watching us."

She pointed to Trump's continued claims that the 2020 election "was a fraud and was stolen. His message: I am still the rightful president, and President Biden is illegitimate. Trump repeats these words now with full knowledge that exactly this type of language provoked violence on Jan. 6."

She continued: "Trump is seeking to unravel critical elements of our constitutional structure that make democracy work—confidence in the result of elections and the rule of law. No other American president has

ever done this.”

She went on to argue what, in previous eras of American politics, would have been considered political ABCs: “The electoral college has spoken. More than 60 state and federal courts, including multiple Trump-appointed judges, have rejected the former president’s arguments, and refused to overturn election results. That is the rule of law; that is our constitutional system for resolving claims of election fraud.

“The question before us now is whether we will join Trump’s crusade to delegitimize and undo the legal outcome of the 2020 election, with all the consequences that might have.”

Significantly, Cheney’s closing appeal was not so much to the Republicans but to the Democratic Party, which now controls both houses of Congress, to establish a bipartisan commission to investigate the January 6 storming of the Capitol.

Trump and the Republican House leadership have responded to Cheney’s declarations with rage, while redoubling efforts to replace her with Representative Stefanik, who actually voted with Trump far less often than did Cheney, and once chaired the “moderate” Republican Tuesday Group. Stefanik came to prominence with her strident defense of Trump during the first impeachment effort by the Democrats in the fall of 2019, which she vocally opposed as a member of the House Judiciary Committee.

Cheney has drawn far more support and sympathy from the Democratic Party than from the Republicans. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said that it was a “shame” that Cheney was being ousted, adding, “I think Liz Cheney’s greatest offense apparently is she is principled, and she believes in the truth.”

Speaking with reporters Wednesday at the White House, President Biden called the conflict within the House Republicans “a mini-revolution” and expressed regret over the damage being done to the opposition party. “We badly need a Republican Party,” Biden said. “We need a two-party system. It’s not healthy to have a one-party system.”

He lamented, “I think the Republicans are further away from trying to figure out who they are and what they stand for than I thought they would be at this point.”

This statement is remarkable both for what it reveals

about Biden and the Democrats, and what it covers up about the Republicans and Trump. Biden fears the crisis of the Republican Party may damage the two-party system, which has served the American ruling class for decades as the principal barrier to the working class entering into an independent political struggle against the profit system.

The Democrats need the Republican Party as a pretext for blocking action to meet the social needs of working people—“We’d love to do this, but we can’t because of Republican opposition”—and to give bipartisan sanction to the military interventions required by American imperialism around the world.

And for all of Biden’s supposed incomprehension, the Republicans have clearly “figured out who they are and what they stand for.” With the purging of Cheney, the Republican leadership has declared that the 2020 election was illegitimate and the January 6 attack on Congress justified. The Republican Party is the party of Donald Trump, rejecting democracy and elections and taking an authoritarian and fascistic direction.

It is no accident that Republican state legislatures and governors in virtually every state are passing laws to make voting more difficult and to criminalize assistance to voters, all based on bogus claims that the 2020 elections involved massive fraud.

Representative Stefanik recently appeared on the talk show hosted by Steve Bannon, Trump’s former fascistic counselor, and referred to Trump several times not as the former president but as “the president,” whose support she was proud to have.



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