

After three ballots, Republicans fail to elect a House speaker, paralyzing incoming US Congress

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3 January 2023

For the first time in 100 years, the incoming House of Representatives failed to elect a speaker on the first ballot, due to bitter divisions within the majority Republican conference. A group of far-right Republicans, members of the House Freedom Caucus, refused to vote for House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, depriving him of the majority of voting representatives (from both parties) required to win election as speaker.

In the course of three ballots and more than four hours of voting, McCarthy fell well short of the 218 votes needed to gain a majority in the 435-member chamber. According to longstanding House rules, no business can be conducted until the speaker is elected, not even the official swearing in of the members of the new (118th) House of Representatives. The House speaker occupies a critical position in the US constitutional system, including serving as the second in line to the presidency behind the vice president.

There is no procedure for circumventing election by the entire House, and as of 5:30 PM Tuesday, when the House adjourned for the day, both sides were declaring their determination to stand firm and force as many ballots as necessary to elect a speaker. The House is set to reconvene at noon on Wednesday.

The key organizers of the anti-McCarthy campaign, including Andy Biggs and Paul Gosar of Arizona, Matt Gaetz of Florida, Matt Rosendale of Montana, Ralph Norman of South Carolina and Bob Good of Virginia, have demanded that McCarthy agree to savage austerity measures such as a balanced federal budget, a requirement that any spending earmark require two-thirds support of the House, and revival of the Holman rule, which allows lawmakers to use spending bills to

defund specific programs and fire federal officials or reduce their pay.

McCarthy has reportedly agreed to the group's demands to revive the Holman rule, establish that any five House members can call an immediate recall election for House speaker at any time, and impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas as part of an intensified crackdown against immigrants on the southern border.

This, however, is deemed insufficient by his opponents.

In the first ballot, McCarthy won 203 votes against 10 for Arizona Representative Andy Biggs, who formally challenged McCarthy. There were six votes for former Freedom Caucus chair Jim Jordan of Ohio, as well as three other anti-McCarthy votes, bringing that total to 19. The Democrats voted unanimously for Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, giving him 212 votes.

Jordan, who is backing McCarthy, as is another prominent fascistic House member, Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, nominated McCarthy to begin the second ballot. Up to now, Donald Trump has also publicly endorsed McCarthy.

Florida fascist Congressman Matt Gaetz, one of the hard-core McCarthy opponents, nominated Jordan, who won all 19 anti-McCarthy votes in the second round. In the third round, Jordan (who maintains that he is not a candidate) was again put forward as the alternative to McCarthy, and he picked up the vote of Florida Congressman Byron Donalds, bringing the anti-McCarthy vote to 20.

The impasse in the selection of House speaker is a further expression of the growing crisis and dysfunction of bourgeois democratic institutions not only in the US,

but internationally. What remains of democratic forms are breaking down under the combined weight of economic and financial crisis, the impact of the COVID pandemic, expanding war and military spending, to the point of risking nuclear conflict with Russia and China, and, above all, a growing offensive of the working class, which is taking the form of a rebellion against the pro-corporate union bureaucracies.

Within this crisis of political rule, divisions within the ruling elite are intensifying, and the influence of far-right and openly fascist elements is growing. Whatever the specific outcome of the crisis over the House speaker selection, there will be a further accommodation to the most far-right forces and a shift to the right by the political system as a whole.

All of the contenders put forward thus far for House speaker—McCarthy, Biggs, Jordan—were among the 139 House Republicans who voted against certifying the election of Joe Biden hours *after* Trump’s fascist mob had been cleared out of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. McCarthy, after mildly criticizing Trump on the floor of the House after the failed coup, made his infamous pilgrimage to Mar-a-Lago three weeks later to seek Trump’s forgiveness.

Biggs, in particular, was deeply involved in the organization of “Stop the Steal” fascist rallies that preceded Trump’s January 6 rally at the Ellipse and subsequent assault on Congress.

The response of Biden and the Democratic Party to the Republican crisis has been to double down on their appeals for a “partnership” with the GOP in conducting the war against Russia in Ukraine and the intensifying war against the working class at home.

Democratic House Minority Leader Jeffries held a press conference after the House had adjourned at which he called on the Republicans to work with the Democrats and Biden. He said, “We are prepared to try and find common ground with the other side of the aisle to solve problems on behalf of the American people, but we don’t have a willing partner in House Republicans... because the Republican conference has apparently been taken over by extreme MAGA Republicans.”

In fact, over the past month the two parties of big business have joined hands in carrying out an attack on 100,000 US rail workers, passing a bipartisan bill to ban a strike and impose a sellout contract that had been

voted down by rank-and-file workers. That was followed several weeks later by passage of an omnibus budget bill that allocates record sums—totaling nearly \$900 billion in the new fiscal year—for military spending and the expanding war in Ukraine, while cutting spending in real terms for domestic programs such as health care, housing and education. This includes allowing states to begin kicking people off of Medicaid as early as next April, when states can begin reviewing eligibility of recipients.

On Wednesday, Biden will appear with Senate Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Republican Ohio Governor Mike DeWine on the Kentucky side of the Cincinnati area to tout the bipartisan \$1 trillion “infrastructure” bill passed in 2021, which gives massive subsidies to corporations.

After the failure of the third ballot on Tuesday, former Republican congressman and one-time acting White House chief of staff for Donald Trump, Mick Mulvaney, suggested that the impasse might be resolved by forging a compromise with the Democrats.



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