

After McCarthy election, Republicans, Democrats outline right-wing budget agendas

Patrick Martin
8 January 2023

President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats hastened to offer their congratulations to newly elected Republican Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy and pledged to seek bipartisan collaboration in the running of Congress and setting of policy over the final two years of Biden's term in office.

Biden himself issued a statement Saturday full of traditional boilerplate about how the American people "expect their leaders to govern in a way that puts their needs above all else, and that is what we need to do now." He took no note of the extraordinary character of the events of the previous five days.

"As I said after the midterms," the statement continued, "I am prepared to work with Republicans when I can and voters made clear that they expect Republicans to be prepared to work with me as well. Now that the leadership of the House of Representatives has been decided it is time for that process to begin."

Two years after the January 6 attack on the Capitol, which delayed congressional certification of Biden's victory in the Electoral College into the early hours of January 7, 2021, a second insurrection, by Republicans who played a major role in that fascistic attack, delayed McCarthy's election as Speaker until the early hours of January 7, 2023.

While the nearly identical timing of the two events was coincidental, the nature of the forces involved was not. Those who led the Republican opposition to McCarthy included nearly all those representatives deeply involved in the "Stop the Steal" campaign of lies and provocations which set the stage for the attack on the Capitol by a pro-Trump mob intent on keeping him in the White House even though he had been defeated in the 2020 election.

The 20 ultra-right representatives extracted a number

of concessions from McCarthy on process and policy, the most important of which have not been made public, according to Nancy Mace, a Republican representative from South Carolina who backed McCarthy throughout.

Appearing on the CBS program "Face the Nation," Mace said that the rules package announced Friday did not differ from the one proposed by McCarthy previously, except for a reduction in the number of representatives required to put a motion to "vacate the chair" before the House. This motion, forcing a new vote to elect the Speaker, can now be demanded by a single member, rather than the five members initially proposed by McCarthy.

Mace asked, "My question really today is, what backroom deals were cut, did they try to cut, and did they get those?"

She continued, "And we don't know what they got or didn't get. We haven't seen it. We don't have any idea what promises were made or what gentleman's handshakes were made... We just have no idea at this point. And it does give me quite a bit of heartburn, because that's not what we ran on."

Mace said she was considering voting against the rules package Monday, and a second Republican, Tony Gonzales of Texas, said he was committed to voting "no." On this vote, as on the speakership, McCarthy can afford to lose only four Republicans, since all the Democrats will vote against it and he has a majority of only nine.

There was no suggestion by Democratic congressional leaders, however, that they would mount any serious effort to block the Republican rules package.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, appearing on the NBC program *Meet the Press*,

criticized what he called “the *extreme* MAGA agenda,” a term now being employed by Biden & Co. to suggest a major distinction between the far-right “Make America Great Again” agenda of the Republican Party as a whole and the more extreme agenda of a smaller number of Republican representatives. By implication, members of the former, including McCarthy, are acceptable “governing partners,” while the latter may be beyond the pale.

The artificial nature of this characterization is underscored by the fact that McCarthy was among the 139 Republican House members who voted against certifying Biden’s Electoral College victory in the early morning hours of January 7, 2021, hours after Trump’s fascist mob had vacated the Capitol. Moreover, Trump publicly supported McCarthy’s election as House Speaker in the aftermath of the GOP’s winning a narrow majority in the House in the 2022 midterm elections.

McCarthy, for his part, made a point of thanking Trump for his support within minutes of winning election on the 15th ballot, adding that no one should doubt the ex-president’s continuing influence within the Republican Party.

Jeffries and other Democrats who appeared on Sunday morning television interview programs or otherwise commented on McCarthy’s election as Speaker emphasized two main dangers from the evident increase in influence within the House Republican conference of its most openly fascist elements: the prospect of a default on US government debt if Congress fails to raise the debt ceiling when that is required sometime this summer; and the possibility of cuts in the massive US military aid to Ukraine for the NATO proxy war against Russia.

Jeffries himself professed his opposition to measures that “endanger national security and defense,” while at the same time declaring that Democrats want to “extend the hand of partnership to the other side.” To emphasize the point, he added, “We are willing to find common ground.”

How this would be possible with a House Republican caucus that in its majority voted against certifying the election of Biden, and therefore declared that Trump, not Biden, was the legitimate president, he did not explain—nor was he asked. Both the media and the Democrats were careful to avoid discussing the obvious

link between January 6, 2021, and the week-long crisis in the organization of the new House provoked by the ultra-right blocking of the election of a Speaker.

Other Democrats, including Minority Whip Katherine Clark, appearing on CNN’s “State of the Union,” cited the demands of nearly all Republican representatives for McCarthy to use the debt ceiling vote to force through significant cuts in domestic social spending. But they focused not so much on cuts in spending as on the prospect of a prolonged stalemate leading to the US government failing to make its debt payments, triggering a downgrading of the US credit rating.

Their main concern, clearly, was the impact on the financial markets and the potential losses on Wall Street, not the impact of social spending cuts on the American people.

Biden referred only indirectly to this issue in his statement, urging Democrats and Republicans work together to “protect Social Security and Medicare,” but saying nothing about spending cuts in discretionary programs such as food stamps, housing, education and transportation, which are more likely to be the initial targets of any attack by the House Republicans.

Those Republicans who appeared on the Sunday talk shows spoke openly of their plans to use the debt limit to “drive the trajectory of the debt down,” as Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, one of the 2021 coup plotters and the 2023 holdouts against McCarthy, said on ABC.

Jim Jordan, a co-founder of the fascist House Freedom Caucus who backed McCarthy, said that in a budget review triggered by a debt ceiling standoff, “Everything has to be on the table.” He added that they had “better look at the money we send to Ukraine as well.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact