

US political crisis deepens with removal of Kevin McCarthy as House speaker

Jacob Crosse, Barry Grey
3 October 2023

For the first time in US history, the speaker of the House has been removed from office by a vote of House members, leaving the House paralyzed until a new leader can be elected.

Bitter divisions within the Republican conference torpedoed California Republican Kevin McCarthy's speakership after 269 days, the third shortest term in US history. The central priority of the Democratic Party, meanwhile, is to ensure the uninterrupted and expanded flow of money and arms to Washington's puppet regime in Kiev so as to escalate the war against Russia over Ukraine.

McCarthy's ouster comes less than nine months after he assumed the position following 15 rounds of voting, and exactly 1,000 days after the attack on the Capitol by Donald Trump's far-right mob, aimed at overthrowing the election of President Joe Biden. Many of the same far-right members of the Republican caucus who opposed McCarthy's elevation to speaker in January were behind the effort to force him out this week, including Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz and Arizona Rep. Andy Biggs.

The final vote to eject McCarthy was 216-210, with eight Republicans and 208 Democrats supporting the "motion to vacate" the office of House speaker.

McCarthy himself is no "moderate." A supporter of Trump and promoter of the lie that the 2020 election was "stolen" by the Democrats, he advocates an intensification of the crackdown against migrants and massive cuts in social programs. He has made one concession after another to the demands of the most far-right and fascist elements in the Republican Party, including his agreement to allow any single House member to force a vote to remove him by lodging a motion to vacate his office.

He supports anti-abortion legislation and the "herd

immunity" policies that have led to countless deaths and millions of cases of long COVID in the ongoing pandemic.

More recently, he initiated an impeachment inquiry against President Biden based on allegations of corruption in relation to the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden.

His conflict with the group of House members who organized his removal has increasingly centered on his support for the war in Ukraine, under conditions where a majority of Republican House members, backed by Trump, have voted against additional US funding for the Ukraine military.

The speaker of the House is an enormously important position in the US government. The speaker decides which legislation comes to the floor for debate and makes appointments to key committees. One of the few national officials listed in the US Constitution, the speaker is second in the line of succession to the president, following the vice president.

The last time a motion to vacate was filed was in 1910. Tuesday's vote was the first time it succeeded. Previous Republican speakers in the last decade, including Paul Ryan and John Boehner, opted to resign or retire under the threat of motion to vacate from far-right members of their conference.

The motion to vacate was filed by Gaetz, a proxy for former President Trump, after McCarthy enabled Republicans and Democrats to pass a bipartisan continuing resolution (CR) on Saturday to avert a government shutdown and fund the federal government through November 17.

Following the vote to remove McCarthy, Gaetz confirmed in an interview that he had "spoken to President Trump over the last several days."

While the media has presented the crisis as a conflict

of personalities, Tuesday's vote is reflection of deep divisions within the ruling class itself. Gaetz and roughly a dozen other far-right Republicans opposed the CR because it lacked social spending cuts and further appropriations for the border police.

In an interview on *Newsmax* following the vote, Gaetz, speaking for a faction of finance capital, rejected accusations that without a speaker the government would be thrown into "chaos" and reiterated that McCarthy was stripped of the speaker's gavel because of his refusal to enact sufficiently draconian spending cuts.

"Chaos is the dollar losing its status as the global reserve currency. Chaos is the greatest nation in the world sitting on top of \$33 trillion debt. Chaos is accepting Biden budgets that will lead to \$2 trillion annual deficits...forever," said Gaetz.

Following his ouster, McCarthy told a closed-door meeting of House Republicans that he would not seek reelection as speaker. At a subsequent Tuesday evening news conference he said, "I will not run for speaker again... I'll have the conference pick somebody else."

Republican Patrick McHenry of North Carolina is currently serving as the interim speaker. McHenry said the House would not meet again until next Tuesday, with the aim of holding a vote for the new speaker on Wednesday, October 11. Several names have been floated by Republican representatives as possible candidates to replace McCarthy, including Majority Leader Steve Scalise (Louisiana), Majority Whip Tom Emmer (Minnesota), Kevin Hern (Oklahoma) and even Donald Trump.

While it is unclear who, if anyone, will be the speaker in the immediate future, what is clear is that Tuesday's vote marks an inflection point in the ongoing US political crisis, which has not subsided more than two-and-a-half years after Trump's failed coup. The ousting of McCarthy sets the stage for even more explosive political convulsions and a further shift to the right by the entire political establishment.

At the brief meeting of the House Republican conference following the vote to remove McCarthy, the deposed speaker reported that Democratic House leaders had approached him on a possible deal to keep him in office. McCarthy reportedly claimed that he refused to discuss any such deal.

However, the present chaos does not foreclose the possibility of the Biden White House and Democratic leaders striking such a deal as part of the election of a new speaker, based on an agreement to continue funding the US war against Russia in Ukraine.

The unprecedented removal of the House speaker follows the debacle of the "spring offensive" in Ukraine and comes in the midst of a massive upsurge of working class struggles in the US and internationally, including among US autoworkers, actors and healthcare workers.

As Tuesdays' vote was being held, Trump was in New York City for the second day of his civil trial, during which he was ordered to stop issuing violent threats against the judge and the judge's clerk. President Biden, obviously in failing health as he approaches his 81st birthday, is cratering in the polls while facing an impeachment inquiry. His son, Hunter, pleaded "not guilty" to three federal firearms charges on Tuesday.

As the intersecting political, economic and social crises mount, the central concern of the Democratic Party is to maintain a working relationship with its "Republican colleagues" in order to prosecute the war against Russia in Ukraine, prepare for military conflict with China, and suppress working class resistance to continued attacks on wages and jobs, social cuts and ever increasing levels of social inequality.

The main concern of the bulk of the mainstream media and the Democratic Party is that the political conflict within the House will stall a massive infusion of funds for the war in Ukraine. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday that the existing funding was only enough to "meet Ukraine's urgent battlefield needs for a bit, for a bit longer."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact