

As House Republican crisis deepens: Democrats seeking deal on Ukraine, Israel military aid

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The deadlock in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives worsened Thursday, with Majority Leader Steve Scalise, the Republican nominee for Speaker, withdrawing as a candidate because he was unable to obtain the near-unanimous support of his caucus required by narrow Republican majority in the House.

With only a 221-212 margin of control, and all 212 Democrats committed to voting for House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, the Republican nominee cannot obtain the 217 votes required for election if even five Republicans vote against him.

Scalise won the nomination of the Republican conference Wednesday by the narrow margin of 113-99 over House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan, but more than a dozen Republicans have said they will back Jordan or another choice rather than Scalise if a vote for Speaker is actually held in the full House.

Before Scalise's withdrawal Thursday evening, the House met in a noon session, but immediately went into recess for lack of a Speaker. The House Republican Conference then began a closed-door, no-cellphone meeting that lasted some three hours but ended without any decisions or visible progress, according to attendees.

After further discussions with individual members and within the Republican leadership, Scalise announced he was withdrawing his candidacy, leaving the Republican caucus in disarray and the House as a whole unable to carry out any business.

The Biden administration, the Democratic leadership in the House, and those Republicans closest to the military-intelligence apparatus have begun to voice support for a bipartisan deal in which House Democrats supply enough votes to allow a Republican to be elected Speaker.

Under House rules, they need not actually cast votes for the Republican, only absent themselves from the chamber

during the vote in sufficient numbers to reduce the total required for election (a majority of those present and voting) to the number of Republicans who will actually vote for Scalise.

In return for gaining the vital post of Speaker—a constitutional officer who controls the flow of legislation, appoints members of committees, and is next in line of presidential succession after Vice President Kamala Harris—the Republicans would agree to a spending bill that would provide tens of billions in military aid to Ukraine, billions in military aid to Israel, and billions for the further militarization of the US-Mexico border.

The outlines of a deal tying Ukraine military aid with a massive border crackdown have been discussed for weeks in congressional offices and floated in various forms in the corporate media. The outbreak of war in the Middle East, with Israel preparing an all-out attack on the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, has added military aid for Israel to the package.

For the Biden administration and the Democrats, prosecuting the war against Russia in Ukraine to the maximum extent has become the central focus of their policy. In the ongoing budget crisis, which came within hours of a federal government shutdown on September 30, their overriding concern was to prevent a cutoff of aid to Ukraine. White House officials now say that the administration has depleted virtually all the various contingency funds available for the Pentagon for this purpose.

The demands of the military-intelligence apparatus are driving a section of the House Republicans as well. Representative Mike Rogers, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, left the Republican meeting Thursday denouncing the eight Republican “traitors” who had voted to remove Speaker Kevin McCarthy last week

and said that if they now decided to support Scalise, “then there’s just another eight like them.”

He added, “The bottom line is we have a very fractured conference, and to limit ourselves to just getting 217 out of our conference, I think, is not a wise path.” Any Republican candidate for Speaker would “absolutely” need Democratic votes to be elected. This implies a bipartisan deal along the lines being discussed.

On Wednesday, Rogers (R-Alabama) and Adam Smith (D-Washington), the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, issued a joint statement denouncing the Hamas attacks on Israel and urging full US support for Israel’s military response. Rogers and Smith had previously backed stepped-up US military aid to Ukraine.

House Minority Whip Katherine Clark (D-Massachusetts), the number two Democrat in the leadership, asked if the Democrats would discuss a bipartisan deal to elect a speaker, replied, “That is going to be up to our caucus to make that decision. But our door is open.”

Minority Leader Jeffries told reporters, “House Democrats have continued to make clear that we are ready, willing and able to fly a bipartisan path forward.” Asked to elaborate, he said, “It means partnering to reopen the House so that we can get the business of the American people done and changing the rules that were enacted in January that empowers their most extreme members.”

The contours of such a deal were elaborated in an editorial Thursday in the *Washington Post*, which urged Scalise to “avoid repeating Kevin McCarthy’s mistakes” by turning to the Democrats for support. This would start with an agreement to extend funding authorization for the federal government and avoiding any federal shutdown.

Such a deal should include “emergency military support for Israel” and continued military and economic aid to Ukraine which is “vital to providing an embattled pro-U.S. nation with the weapons, materiel and intelligence it needs...” Both Democrats and Republicans would now agree with action on migrants crossing the US-Mexico border, with hundreds of thousands now seeking refuge in cities like New York, Chicago and Washington DC.

The editorial cited reports that “the White House is weighing a supplemental funding package that would group together these issues—Israel, Ukraine and the border. Such a deal should be a top priority for the next speaker, along with funding the rest of the government’s operations. It would represent a thoughtful balancing of the parties’ priorities.”

This is the formula for a program of militarism and attacks on democratic rights embraced by both corporate-controlled parties, without the slightest mention of any social reforms to deal with the deepening social crisis facing working people.

While the ruling class seeks a consensus along these lines, a few dozen fascists among the House Republicans have become the driving force of the political crisis in Washington. They can block any nominee for Speaker, but cannot as yet impose one of their own. Jordan, a co-founder of the House Freedom Caucus, was the closest they have come, but he fell short, despite a well-publicized endorsement by ex-president Donald Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination.

As Rogers indicated, many of the eight Republican representatives who torpedoed McCarthy have declared they will support Scalise. But a new set of ultra-rightists came forward to declare their opposition to Scalise and their determination to vote for Jordan and split the Republican caucus in any public vote of the whole House for Speaker.

McCarthy, the ousted former speaker, seemed to derive satisfaction from Scalise’s difficulties, pointing out that Scalise had predicted he would get 150 votes in the conference, but received only 113, barely more than the 111 required for nomination. He might not be able to recover, McCarthy continued. “It’s possible; it’s a big hill, though.”



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