

Democrats back ultra-right House Speaker: A bipartisan coalition for war and repression

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9 May 2024

Wednesday's vote in the US House of Representatives, with overwhelming bipartisan support to keep ultra-right Louisiana Congressman Mike Johnson in office as Speaker, signifies the formation of a coalition government in all but name. Democrats and Republicans have joined forces on the basis of a common program of war abroad and mass repression at home.

The House voted by 359 to 43 to table a resolution by fascist Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene to declare the Speaker's chair vacant. The motion would have automatically triggered a lengthy series of votes to choose a new leader for the House, under conditions where the narrow partisan divide, 217 Republicans and 213 Democrats (with five seats vacant), means that even a handful of members can block a candidate.

Even more significant than the vote itself was the political basis on which it was carried out. Democrats were explicitly repaying Johnson for his agreeing to bring up for a vote the long-delayed supplemental funding bill to provide military aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

After the funding bill passed last month by a comfortable bipartisan margin, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and other leading Democrats said they would not support a motion to vacate—usually a straight party-line vote—if it was being used to punish Johnson for ending the Republican blockade of the military aid.

Greene initially filed the motion against Johnson in late March, after he orchestrated the bipartisan passage of budget legislation for the current fiscal year, including a record \$825 billion for the Pentagon. But she did not call the motion up for a vote, describing it instead as a “warning,” until Johnson reached agreement with the White House and congressional

Democrats on the supplemental military spending bill, passed by both houses and signed into law by Biden on April 24.

When the Georgia congresswoman finally invoked the motion to declare the Speaker's chair vacant, she was backed by 10 other Republicans. This was the same number of fascists who successfully brought down Speaker Kevin McCarthy last September, when every Democrat voted against him as well.

This time, however, the Democrats were committed to keeping Johnson in office. And rather than supplying Johnson the handful of Democratic votes, or abstentions, actually required for his survival, the Democrats voted en masse to table the motion to vacate, an ostentatious display of support and what Jeffries called a demonstration of “political maturity.”

In a recent interview on “Sixty Minutes,” Jeffries declared:

Even though we're in the minority, we effectively have been governing as if we were in the majority because we continue to provide a majority of the votes necessary to get things done. ... Those are just the facts.

Headlines the next day in the two leading US newspapers took note of the significance of the vote. The *New York Times* wrote, “Mike Johnson Becomes the Speaker of the Whole House. For Now.” The *Washington Post* headline read: “As co-rulers of the House, the Democratic majority-in-waiting may have already arrived.”

The *Times* noted the unprecedented character of the vote, writing: “Members of the minority party in the

House have never propped up the other party's speaker..."

The *Post* wrote, "Democrats on Wednesday evening rode to the rescue of a conservative congressman-turned-speaker and cemented their status as co-rulers of a deeply dysfunctional lower chamber in the process."

Johnson is the most reactionary Speaker in modern US history—a Christian fundamentalist who opposes abortion, favors religion in the public schools and supports massive cuts in public social spending. After the defeat of the motion to vacate, he declared:

I am a lifelong, movement, conservative Republican, and I intend to continue to govern in accordance with those core principles.

Before moving up to leading the House, Johnson voted in favor of the Trump-led challenge to the certification of Biden's victory in the 2020 election. He is committed to backing Trump in the presidential election. Trump praised him after a recent meeting at Mar-a-Lago and hailed the defeat of the motion to vacate in a message posted on his Truth Social social media site.

The Democrats are quite prepared to support an arch-reactionary Speaker so long as he rubberstamps the financing of the US-NATO war against Russia and the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. At the ceremony Tuesday marking Holocaust Remembrance Day, Biden and Johnson stood side by side, each displaying a photograph of Jewish children murdered by the Nazis—as though this somehow justified the Israeli military's murder of more than 10,000 Palestinian children in Gaza.

The domestic side of this bipartisan alliance is equally sinister. Johnson and Biden came together last month to back the passage of legislation to extend Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Security Act, which gives a legal stamp of approval to widespread NSA spying on Americans. And they are now backing the crackdown on student protesters against the Gaza genocide. House hearings have featured bullying of university presidents and school chiefs by both Republicans and Democrats, demanding even more

ferocious repression of students and other demonstrators and the police shutdown of university encampments.

This line-up from Biden and Jeffries to Johnson and Trump in support of war abroad and the buildup of a police state at home has vital political lessons. It explodes the fiction, peddled endlessly by the Biden reelection campaign, that he is the last bulwark of the American people against the right-wing threat to democracy.

It shows the falsity of all the claims by the media apologists for the Democratic Party, as well as pseudo-left groups like the Democratic Socialists of America, that Biden represents a "lesser evil" to Trump and the Republicans in the 2024 elections.

The reality confronting the working class is that the only road forward in the struggle against war and in defense of democratic rights is the development of a mass independent political movement of workers and young people, based on a socialist program and in alliance with our class brothers and sisters around the world.



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