

GOP Picks Mike Johnson as House Speaker Nominee After Tom Emmer Stumbles

Party remains divided three weeks since Kevin McCarthy was ousted
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WASHINGTON—Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana was chosen as House Republicans' latest nominee for speaker in a conference vote late Tuesday, hours after the party elected and then derailed a different member in its search for the elusive candidate who can actually win the gavel.

At the end of a marathon day of internal debate and votes, Johnson, the vice chairman of the House Republican conference, bested Byron Donalds of Florida, a Trump ally popular with many of the House's most conservative lawmakers. In a shift, lawmakers left the Capitol on Tuesday night optimistic that Johnson could unite them after a series of failed attempts to find a successor to former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.), who was ousted three weeks ago.

The [House is frozen](#) until a new speaker is elected. Lawmakers are eager to get back to work, with many wanting [to pass aid to Israel](#) and address a looming government-funding deadline next month. A floor vote could be held as soon as noon Wednesday.

Johnson's ascension marked the last chapter in a dizzying day, as Republicans' divisions and the power of its most conservative members to steer the party were thrust into the spotlight once again. House Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R., Minn.) was chosen as the nominee around lunchtime but dropped his bid by dinner, as [resistance from hard-right members](#) buttressed by former President [Donald Trump](#) sank his chances.

By contrast, lawmakers said Johnson benefited from not being considered part of the core GOP leadership team, whose decisions about policy issues including the debt limit and spending levels have divided House Republicans. Those disagreements culminated in McCarthy's removal and have hobbled efforts to find a replacement.

"The conference just wanted something new. They did not want the old," said Rep. Jodey Arrington (R., Texas). He said that House Republicans first had to consider other members of GOP leadership before landing on Johnson.

Johnson also appeared to have won over at least some lawmakers who had thrown up roadblocks before, including Rep. Matt Gaetz (R., Fla.), who led the charge to oust McCarthy. Gaetz said he believed Johnson had “enthusiastic support” across the party.

Rep. Chip Roy (R., Texas) said Johnson was “the right guy at the right time.”

Emmer’s withdrawal had put the Republicans back to square one for the fourth time, another reset after similar defeats for Reps. Steve Scalise (R., La.) and Jim Jordan (R., Ohio) in recent weeks. Republicans regrouped again late Tuesday to assemble another slate of candidates and hold a fresh vote.

New nominee Johnson previously led the Republican Study Committee, a broad group of conservative members, but has less experience in leadership than the previous three speaker picks. The 51-year-old joined Congress in 2017 and serves on the House Judiciary Committee.

In a sign of frustration over a long and messy process that pitted factions of the GOP against each other, the tally in the final round was 128 for Johnson, to 29 for Donalds, with 44 protest votes for “other”—all but one for McCarthy. The other candidates to be eliminated or drop out in earlier rounds were GOP Rep. Roger Williams of Texas and two Tennessee Republicans, Mark Green and Chuck Fleischmann.

A follow-up round of voting designed to see if lawmakers would support Johnson on the House floor didn’t raise any immediate red flags. Lawmakers said everyone voted for Johnson, with three voting “present.” There were about 20 absences, meaning opposition could still emerge. Chants of “Mike, Mike, Mike” could be heard from the room.

Any candidate for speaker needs a majority of votes in the 433-member House, assuming all members vote for an individual. Republicans currently hold 221 seats compared with 212 for Democrats. No Republican can lose more than four GOP votes to be elected speaker, assuming all Democrats vote for their candidate, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D., N.Y.).

Earlier, House Republicans picked Emmer, a former chairman of the House Republicans’ campaign arm, over fellow finalist Johnson, following a rapid-fire series of votes to winnow an initial group of more than a half dozen hopefuls. The tally in the final round was 117 for Emmer to 97 for Johnson.

The close finish immediately raised questions about whether Emmer could assemble the 217 votes on the House floor needed to become speaker. After Emmer

won the nod, more than 20 members indicated they wouldn't support him, including some members of the House Freedom Caucus who pulled for Jordan last week.

Trump, who is close to Jordan, issued a statement after the GOP vote saying that electing Emmer speaker would be a "tragic mistake," painting him as Republican in name only and insufficiently deferential to Trump and his movement.

Rep. Jim Banks (R., Ind.), who last November lost to Emmer in the race for majority whip, said that Emmer would never be able to win over sufficient holdouts, given a voting record that he characterized as too moderate. Emmer voted to enshrine federal protections for same-sex couples, and also this year supported a debt-ceiling deal and a stopgap spending bill [to avoid a shutdown](#), putting him [at odds with many conservatives](#).

The party has been trying to move beyond a bitter cycle of recriminations. After McCarthy said he wouldn't run again, a group of Republicans backing Jordan blocked Scalise from winning the seat. The bitter feelings from that episode led some Scalise supporters to then vote against elevating Jordan, a rift that widened when some lawmakers said they [had received threats](#) of GOP primary challenges or even physical harm from Jordan supporters.

Lindsay Wise contributed to this article.