

House Republicans Upbeat After Speaker Candidates Make Pitches

GOP will vote for nominee on Tuesday as party hopes for breakthrough after three weeks without a leader

By [Siobhan Hughes](#), [Katy Stech Ferek](#) and [Lindsay Wise](#)

House Republicans haven't settled on a [consensus candidate for speaker](#), but many emerged from a meeting Monday with guarded optimism that they will be able to rally behind whoever clinches the nomination after three weeks of public feuding.

Lawmakers met Monday night to hear proposals from candidates who explained their strategy for unifying a fractured group and executing legislative priorities such as cutting federal spending and increasing border security. A GOP vote to select the party's nominee is scheduled for Tuesday morning, with a floor vote of the full House expected in coming days.

While many lawmakers have yet to publicly endorse a candidate, support appeared to pool around House Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R., Minn.); Republican Study Committee chairman Rep. Kevin Hern (R., Okla.); House Republican conference vice chairman Rep. Mike Johnson (R., La.); and Byron Donalds of Florida, an ally of former President Donald Trump.

"I'll tell you this: The morale in the room seems higher," said Rep. Nick LaLota (R., N.Y.). "The hope that we do it this week seems higher than previous weeks. There seems to be some sense of compromise in the room, a little less insistence that it has to be their person to win."

Rep. Dusty Johnson (R., S.D.) said he is confident one of the eight candidates will become speaker. "I'm just going to tell you, I'm optimistic," he told reporters outside the meeting.

GOP lawmakers have been eager to get back to work, with many wanting to expedite new aid for Israel and a government funding deadline looming. The House has been frozen after eight Republicans [engineered the ouster of former speaker Kevin McCarthy \(R., Calif.\)](#), saying he broke promises he made when he secured the post after 15 rounds of voting in January.

Two subsequent would-be replacements, Reps. Steve Scalise of Louisiana and Jim Jordan of Ohio, won the nomination but failed to win the gavel and withdrew. All were felled by the tough math facing a potential leader. Because of Republicans' narrow 221-212 majority, GOP candidates for speaker can lose no more than four votes from their party, assuming all Democrats vote against them.

Other candidates for speaker include: Rep. Pete Sessions (R., Texas), a former head of the House Republicans' campaign arm; Rep. Gary Palmer (R., Ala.), who was part of McCarthy's inner circle as a member of the House Elected Leadership Committee; Rep. Jack Bergman of Michigan, a retired U.S. Marine Corps lieutenant general; and Rep. Austin Scott of Georgia, who briefly challenged Jordan in the Oct. 13 Republican conference vote that led Jordan to claim the title of speaker-designee.

Rep. Dan Meuser of Pennsylvania dropped out of the race during the meeting, saying there were enough talented candidates and that Trump supported his decision to withdraw.

"I've got more faith right now than I've had in the last two weeks that we're going to stop the nonsense and we're going to get a fresh start...and get the job done," he said.

The large field sets the stage for an unpredictable result. With eight candidates, the internal House GOP conference voting could go for multiple rounds, with the candidate receiving the fewest number of votes in each round removed until a candidate wins a majority of the votes. After that, the House speaker-designate must win support from a majority in the House, hitting 217 of the 433 House votes if all members show up and cast a vote for an individual.

Emmer, 62 years old, appeared to have an advantage heading into the race by having jobs within the Republican party that required him to build relationships with individual members since he was elected to Congress a decade ago. He served as the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, the House Republicans' recruiting arm, from 2019 through 2022 before winning the No. 3 position in the House Republican conference.

He is backed by McCarthy, and his backers say that nobody is better equipped to raise money or manage the conference, having raised more than \$7.6 million so far this year, spent 81 days on the road and assembled a battle-tested team of aides.

But Emmer doesn't have a close relationship with Trump, whose allies are starting to target Emmer. Former Trump strategist Steve Bannon on Friday called Emmer "the biggest never-Trumper in the House" and "a guy who hates Donald Trump," saying he has no chance to become speaker.

A person close to Trump said Trump hasn't told allies to attack Emmer but wasn't discouraging them either.

Of all the candidates running, Emmer is one of only two GOP candidates—along with Scott—who declined to object to the 2020 election results from both Arizona and Pennsylvania, which Trump lost. Six of the eight candidates—Donalds, Hern,

Johnson, Palmer, Sessions and Bergman—voted to object to the results from both states.

Emmer also voted for the measure that is keeping the government funded through Nov. 17, which passed with more Democratic than Republican support. That vote was critical for Rep. Mike Garcia of California, who said he endorsed Emmer in part because of his voting record.

“Keeping the lights on, not intentionally driving the government into a shutdown is important,” Garcia said.

In a party with growing sentiment against supporting Ukraine against Russia, Emmer voted for a \$40 billion package of aid to Ukraine in 2022 and earlier this year was among the minority of Republicans voting to add \$300 million to a program supporting Kyiv known as the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

Elected in 2020, Donalds is the only member of the hard-line House Freedom Caucus to run for speaker. On Monday, he was endorsed by the Tea Party Patriots Action, an ultraconservative grassroots group.

“The thing about Byron is that he’s a really smart guy and he’s a very good listener,” said Rep. Mario Diaz Balart of Florida, who endorsed him.

Rep. Pat Fallon (R., Texas) endorsed Johnson, saying he is smart and “has limited to no baggage.”

“If we have to go back to the drawing board after tomorrow, it would just be really defeating,” he said. “We have to get there this week. We absolutely have to.”