

Jim Jordan's Backers for House Speaker Say This Time Is Different

Allies say support from grassroots conservatives will help him win, but dozens of GOP holdouts present a tough hurdle

By Lindsay Wise
Wall Street Journal

WASHINGTON—Some Republicans say strong support from grassroots conservatives will help new House speaker nominee Jim Jordan (R., Ohio) [win over dozens of GOP critics](#) and take the gavel this week. But opponents are standing firm, Democrats are angling for a role and the math remains unforgiving, setting the stage for another unpredictable floor vote.

Pressure is mounting on Republican lawmakers to resolve their internal fighting nearly two weeks after Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.) [was ousted in a historic vote](#). The White House is poised to ask Congress for an emergency national security aid package that could fund Ukraine, Taiwan, Israel and U.S. border security through next year's presidential election. The Senate returns Monday from a weeklong recess, but without a functioning House, no legislation can pass in Congress and make it to President Biden's desk.

"We've got to get past this stage," Rep. Frank Lucas (R., Okla.) said of the [turmoil over the House speaker](#). "There's not enough political oxygen in this place to think about other stuff."

Jordan, a founder of the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus and staunch ally of former President [Donald Trump](#), clinched the nomination last week after previous pick Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the House majority leader, [bowed out](#). Jordan has locked up about two-thirds of Republicans, leaving him about 65 votes short of the majority of the full House he needs to become speaker.

Republicans sent lawmakers home for the weekend to give Jordan time to win over his critics. The chamber is narrowly divided between 221 Republicans and 212 Democrats, and Jordan needs to win at least 217 votes to become speaker. That means he can afford no more than four Republican defections, if all Democrats oppose him, as is expected.

"We're gonna get 217," Jordan told reporters Friday.

But holdouts within his own party emphasize he can't get there without their support.

"It's a very difficult math equation for him to overcome," said Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R., Fla.), who plans to vote against Jordan on the floor. Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R., Texas), who backs Jordan, said on CNN: "Nothing's impossible, but it's going to be really, really difficult, based on what I'm hearing."

Lawmakers pointed to Jordan's support from grass-roots Republicans and conservative media as potentially putting pressure on his opponents to back him.

"There's nobody stronger in the grassroots than Jim Jordan. Nobody," said Rep. Tim Burchett (R., Tenn.).

Jordan, as head of the Judiciary Committee and a GOP-led panel on the "weaponization of the federal government," has helped probe what Republicans view as the Biden administration's overreach and family scandals. Biden has long denied wrongdoing.

A group of eight Republican dissidents voted with Democrats to oust McCarthy on Oct. 3. They were furious that he had relied on Democratic votes to [avoid a partial government shutdown](#) a few days earlier. The unprecedented move to "vacate the chair" plunged the House into disarray. Many of those holdouts, including ringleader Rep. Matt Gaetz (R., Fla.), are now on board with backing Jordan, but [their tactics](#) shone the way for other disgruntled lawmakers to throw up roadblocks.

Gaetz said he believed the number of Jordan opponents would winnow, noting that the votes Friday for the nominee were secret ballots and that the floor votes will be public. "It's quite a different thing to stand on the floor of the House of Representatives," he said on MSNBC. "I know how hard it is to stand on the floor and vote against the party's choice," he said.

Two tallies on Friday showed Jordan's challenges. In an internal vote Friday, Jordan defeated Rep. Austin Scott (R., Ga.), 124-81, to become the party's nominee for speaker. In a second internal vote, 152 Republicans said they would vote for him on the floor, while 55 were opposed—more than enough to deny him the gavel.

Scalise tried and failed to meet the 217-vote threshold. He withdrew his candidacy on Thursday. [McCarthy won 188 votes](#) in his own conference tally, and eventually prevailed in the speaker vote on the floor [after 15 rounds](#).

McCarthy has thrown his support behind Jordan. "We cannot have this 'Gaetz doctrine' continued any further," he said on Fox News, referring to the power of a

small party minority. “I think Jim Jordan can get there. I’m one who understands how difficult it is.”

Democrats also say they could help get a speaker across the line, in exchange for concessions such as rules changes that would enable bills with substantial bipartisan support to get to the floor.

“There are informal conversations that have been under way. When we get back to Washington tomorrow, it’s important to begin to formalize those discussions,” said House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D., N.Y.) on NBC News.

Rep. Mike Turner (R., Ohio), chairman of the intelligence committee, said he thought either Jordan or another Republican would be able to become speaker. But if any minority of Republicans continues to block the House from getting back to work, he said, “then I think obviously, a deal will have to be done” with Democrats.

If Jordan can’t win a majority of the House’s 433 members, other Republican candidates could throw their hats in the ring. Potential contenders include Oklahoma Rep. Kevin Hern, chair of the conservative Republican Study Committee, House Majority Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota and Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, vice chairman of the House Republican conference.

“We need to get on with this. We’ve been messing with it too long,” said Rep. Roger Williams (R., Texas.). “We need a speaker of the House.”

Some Republicans have said they are considering a resolution that would temporarily enhance the powers of Speaker Pro Tempore Patrick McHenry (R., N.C.) so the House can pass legislation to fund the government and the war in Ukraine and respond to the [Hamas attack on Israel](#). Currently McHenry’s purview is limited to facilitating the election of a new speaker.

But Republicans likely would need Democratic help to pass such a resolution, and while some Democrats have said they are open to the idea, many Republicans are wary.

Rep. John Rutherford (R., Fla.), a member of the powerful appropriations committee, bemoaned the upheaval in the House on Friday. “It drives me crazy,” he said. But he wasn’t ready to cut a deal with Democrats and said he doesn’t think McHenry is either.

“Rightly so, I think he’s resisting that,” Rutherford said.