

What Happens Next in the House Speaker Race

Removal of Kevin McCarthy leaves Republicans with a week to pick chamber's new leader

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WASHINGTON—A Republican Party still reeling from the [sudden ouster of Kevin McCarthy](#) is now rushing to find a new leader who could unite a fractured conference and be elected speaker as soon as next week.

After a chaotic day of voting toppled McCarthy, Speaker Pro Tempore Patrick McHenry (R., N.C.)—running the House temporarily—closed the chamber to give colleagues time to find their next leader. He said Republican hopefuls would make their pitch next Tuesday with the goal of a vote the following Wednesday. House business, including efforts to fund the government before a November deadline, was put on hold until then.

McCarthy was removed in a 216-210 vote from his post Tuesday after nine months of fighting with a hard-right conservative wing of the party, just days after he engineered [legislation to avert a government shutdown](#). Because of his narrow majority and a procedure that allows one member to force a vote on removing a speaker, the eight Republicans who voted alongside all Democrats were enough to oust him.

“Four percent of our conference can join all of the Democrats and dictate who will be the Republican speaker of this House,” a frustrated McCarthy told reporters Tuesday night. Asked what his advice to the next speaker would be, McCarthy responded: “Change the rules.”

Who could be next

Some names were already emerging as possible successors, but it wasn't clear who could unite the conference. It took McCarthy 15 rounds to prevail in January, and nine months later, he was out.

Rep. Steve Scalise, the House majority leader, started making calls to fellow Republicans about a possible bid Tuesday night, according to a House GOP aide. The Louisiana Republican is a clear choice for the post as the No. 2 leader who enjoys relationships across the conference. He is currently [being treated for blood cancer](#), but noted Tuesday he felt healthy.

Other possible lawmakers who could get in the race: Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer, the majority whip; Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee; Oklahoma Rep. Kevin Hern who leads a caucus that includes a majority of Republican members; and Texas Rep. Chip Roy, a conservative who voted to save McCarthy.

Late Tuesday night members were beginning to tweet support for their colleagues in an effort to push them into the race.

“There’s a lot of really qualified individuals that are certainly capable,” said Rep. Matt Rosendale (R., Mont.), one of the eight Republicans who forced McCarthy out of the speakership. He said the next speaker had to have the trust of the conference. “That is what Kevin has lost, that’s why he’s not the speaker anymore.”

A controversial rule

McCarthy’s ouster was orchestrated by Rep. Matt Gaetz (R., Fla.), a longtime foe of McCarthy, who forced a vote on a motion to vacate the chair. The motion then passed, with the support of eight Republicans and all Democrats, marking the first time that the procedure had been successfully used in U.S. history.

The same motion will hang over the head of the next speaker. The constant threat of removal will weigh heavily on ambitious members as they consider making a play for the post, even if they can initially get the entire conference to unite behind them. Some Republicans have suggested House rules should be changed to remove the ability of just one lawmaker to move to oust a speaker.

“Whoever gets 218, if they can get 218 with those eight ungovernable people they’ll always hold this over their head and will demand what they just did to Kevin,” McCarthy ally Rep. Don Bacon (R., Neb.) said, referring to the number required to be elected speaker if the House has all 435 members. “I believe you can’t govern with these eight people.”

Speaking on Fox News, Gaetz said he wanted to move directly to a speaker vote.

“We should get to electing a new, more conservative, more trustworthy speaker immediately,” he said. “This is not the time to go home for a week.”

A full plate for the next speaker

McCarthy’s final affront, in the eyes of most of his GOP critics, was the decision last weekend to push off a government shutdown in favor of short-term spending deal

that Democrats supported. The new speaker will have to wrestle with the same questions, as the federal government is only funded through Nov. 17.

The person will also need to balance widely held GOP priorities such as border security with demands from the right flank, stepping up the impeachment investigation into the Biden family's finances, and sharply cutting government spending.

"Today was a sad day for the Republican Party, because every day that goes on where we don't have a speaker is a day we don't have an impeachment inquiry," said Rep. Andy Barr (R., Ky.) on Fox News. "It's a day that goes by where we can't pass conservative appropriations bills. It's a day that passes that we aren't advocating for border security."

The next speaker will have to navigate pressure from the Biden administration and Senate leadership to send more aid to Ukraine, despite shriveling support from House Republicans. In a vote last week, less than half of House Republicans supported restoring Ukraine-related funding to an annual defense appropriations bill.

McCarthy had suggested that Ukraine funding could potentially be paired with tighter border security to garner more House GOP support, and now the next speaker will have to grapple both GOP hard-liners and the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Rep. Michael McCaul (R., Texas), the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called McCarthy's removal "shocking" and said his exit is "bad for Ukraine" and for America's image abroad.

House Republicans will be defending their narrow majority in the 2024 election, and some vulnerable members have urged the party to focus more on issues that appeal to a broader swath of the country. The speaker will likely have to navigate next year's election with former President [Donald Trump](#) at the top of the ticket.