

Second effort to expel George Santos from House fails

By Maegan Vazquez, Azi Paybarah and Paul Kane
Washington Post

A motion to expel Rep. George Santos (R-N.Y.) from the House failed Wednesday evening, with New York Republicans taking the helm in an attempt to remove him over his public false statements and ongoing federal criminal case.

Keeping up with politics is easy with The 5-Minute Fix Newsletter, in your inbox weekdays. Twenty-four House Republicans and 155 Democrats voted to expel Santos, while 182 Republicans and 31 Democrats voted against ousting him from Congress; 15 Democrats and four Republicans voted present.

The Republicans who voted for expulsion largely consisted of GOP lawmakers in swing districts, such as the New Yorkers who forced the vote and Reps. Thomas H. Kean Jr. (N.J.) and John James (Mich.). The Democrats who opposed expulsion came from all over the map, such as Rep. Rashida Tlaib (Mich.), who had just minutes earlier narrowly avoided her own punishment of censure over her opposition to the Israel-Gaza war. Rep. Brendan Boyle (Pa.), the top Democrat on the Budget Committee, voted present, as did members of the Ethics Committee who are overseeing the Santos investigation.

“This was never about me, and I’ll never let it become about me,” Santos wrote, also including a meme of him in the House chamber with a superimposed crown on his head.

“If you come for me, you best not miss,” the text on the image said.

The latest push to expel Santos, who is running for reelection, was led by his fellow Republican freshmen from New York. The House members — Anthony D’Esposito, Nick LaLota, Marcus J. Molinaro, Michael Lawler and Brandon Williams — represent swing districts and face difficult reelection campaigns.

But some House members in both parties had balked at the move, fearing that it could set a precedent for expelling a member who has not been convicted of a crime. Some lawmakers also worried that removing Santos would further normalize the drastic move at a time when the House is also grappling with partisan rancor and declining decorum.

The group that pushed for Santos’s ouster argued that there was enough evidence to expel him. Santos has admitted to “résumé embellishment,” and Nancy Marks, his former campaign treasurer, pleaded guilty to making false statements, obstructing federal campaign regulators and wire fraud in connection to the congressman’s own indictment, which has grown to 23 counts.

Santos pleaded not guilty to those counts, which include fraud, money laundering, falsifying records and aggravated identity theft.

Marks admitted in court that she conspired with Santos to falsely report that they had lent the campaign \$500,000 to help Santos, then a candidate, qualify for an assistance program operated by the national Republican Party.

Ahead of the expulsion vote Wednesday, D'Esposito argued on the House floor that the effort was "an opportunity to set [a] new precedent and to remove someone from the House of Representatives that is not properly representing the people of New York's 3rd Congressional District."

LaLota, who also spoke on the floor, said that "the consequences and precedents of not expelling him for his lies and fraud has the potential to do far more damage to this institution."

He also spotlighted the apparent lies Santos told about Jewish heritage and his mother's proximity to the twin towers during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. LaLota asserted that Santos made those specific false claims to garner political support "as part of a broader scheme to defraud voters and donors to get him elected to Congress, to further defraud voters and swindle donors out of millions."

Santos said the rush by his colleagues to expel him before his criminal case concluded was unfair and would deny him his constitutional right to due process.

Speaking on the House floor after his fellow New York Republicans stated their case, Santos remarked, "I must warn my colleagues that voting for expulsion at this point would circumvent the judicial system's right to due process that I'm entitled to and desanctify the long-held premise that one is presumed innocent until proven guilty."

"It is unconscionable to think that this body, who is at war with the [Justice Department] over their politically motivated practices, would blindly accept their accusation against a member of another branch of government," he added.

In late February, the House Ethics Committee created an investigative subcommittee to look into the allegations against Santos. Santos was charged in May by federal prosecutors with 13 counts, including defrauding his donors, using their money for his personal benefit and wrongfully claiming unemployment benefits. Additional counts were brought in a superseding indictment that was made public last month.

In response to that indictment, House Democrats sought to expel Santos.

Rep. Daniel S. Goldman (D-N.Y.), who co-sponsored that effort, said on the House floor Wednesday that New York Republicans bringing forward the latest expulsion effort are partly motivated by the political pressures in their competitive reelection races.

Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), who was speaker at the time of the first expulsion effort, said in May that the question of whether to expel Santos should wait, since the Ethics Committee “can look at this very quickly.” On Tuesday, the committee said in a statement that it will “announce its next course of action in this matter on or before Nov. 17, 2023.”