

Nine Candidates Start New Race for House Speaker

October 23, 2023 **by Dan McCue**



Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., one of nine Republicans vying to be the next speaker of the House this week. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON — Nine candidates have entered the race for speaker of the House, possibly, just possibly, opening the final chapter of a saga that has left the chamber paralyzed for the past three weeks.

As previously reported by The Well News, the House Republican Conference voted to withdraw its endorsement of Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, on Friday afternoon, after the House Judiciary chair lost in three rounds of voting by ever-growing margins.

Almost immediately afterwards, Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., the chairman of the conservative Republican Study Committee, announced he would now run for speaker.

Hern, who voted for Jordan to stay as the conference's speaker designate, explained his decision on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, saying, "We just had two speaker designates go down. We must unify and do it fast."

In the meantime, the conference set a deadline of noon Sunday for other interested candidates to throw their hat into the ring, presumably after calling on colleagues and testing the waters for support.

Less than an hour later, House Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., announced in a post to X, that eight other candidates have joined Hern in the race.

The plan now is for each of the contenders to make their pitch to the conference at a GOP candidate forum scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday night.

The candidates will then be put up for an internal conference vote at 9 a.m. Tuesday, and Speaker Pro Tem Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., said Sunday that it is his intention to bring a vote on the next speaker to the floor Tuesday afternoon, if possible.

The newcomers to the race are:

Tom Emmer

House Majority Whip Tom Emmer, R-Minn., announced his bid on Saturday. Emmer, the highest-ranking Republican in the race, has already been endorsed by ousted Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

Though his seniority and high profile in the party — he's the number three Republican in the House — might seem like advantages, he's been criticized in the past by the far-right of the party for a perceived lack of fealty to former President Donald Trump. He angered moderates in the party last week by not backing an effort to temporarily expand the powers of McHenry.

Jack Bergman

Rep. Jack Bergman, R-Mich., is a retired Marine Corps lieutenant general who is considered a favorite among conservatives, who didn't want Jordan as speaker.

The problem for Bergman is he has said he's only interested in serving until January, by which time, he presumes, cooler heads will prevail in the party and a new, more long-term speaker can be selected without acrimony.

Mike Johnson

Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., now in his fourth term in the House, is currently the vice chair of the Republican Conference.

An attorney and an evangelical Christian, Johnson was one of the key players in the effort by Republicans on Jan. 6, 2021, to block the certification of President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election. He currently sits on the House Judiciary Committee.

Byron Donalds

Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., is the outspoken and eminently quotable member of the right-wing House Freedom Caucus, and a favorite of reporters because of the time he gives them on the steps and in the hallways of the Capitol.

Now in his second term, he currently sits on the House Oversight and Financial Services Committees.

Nominated for speaker by the Freedom Caucus in January he garnered 20 votes during the 15-round marathon that ultimately saw McCarthy elected.

Dan Meuser

Rep. Dan Meuser, R-Pa., was a business executive and Pennsylvania's secretary of Revenue prior to being elected to Congress in 2019. He currently serves on the House Financial Services and Small Business Committees.

Gary Palmer

Rep. Gary Palmer, R-Ala., is a fifth-term congressman, and another member of the Freedom Caucus. Palmer has distinguished himself by being a lower-key member of the group.

Still, he has extensive credibility with conservatives as he co-founded the Alabama Policy Institute, a right-of-center think tank.

Palmer, who in his college days was a walk-on wide receiver for the University of Alabama, is also the chairman of the Republican Policy Committee.

Because he was a trusted ally of McCarthy and later backed Jordan for speaker, Palmer would try to position himself as a

peacemaker between the House GOP's warring factions. He currently serves on the House Oversight and Accountability Committee and the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Austin Scott

Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., emerged last week as a surprise, last-minute challenger to Jordan for the Republican nomination after House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., dropped out of the race, as previously reported by The Well News. Scott lost the secret ballot against Jordan in a 124-81 vote.

The Georgia congressman was an ally of McCarthy, who called the motion to vacate filed by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., "a selfish waste of time" motivated by "the personal spite" of a select few.

Later, he took to social media to lambast the eight Republicans who voted to remove McCarthy, calling them "nothing more than grifters who have handed control of the House to the Democratic Party in the name of their own glory and fundraising."

Prior to arriving in Congress, Scott served in the Georgia House of Representatives, having been elected to that seat at the age of 26.

In 2001, Scott became the first Republican in the Georgia House to work with Democrats to remove the Confederate battle emblem from the state's flag.

Pete Sessions

Rep. Pete Sessions, R-Texas, first served in Congress from 1997 to 2019, before being defeated by Democrat Colin Allred.

He returned to Congress in 2021 after running for and winning the seat in a neighboring congressional district.

Sessions voted against the second impeachment of Donald Trump after the 2021 storming of the United States Capitol. He also was among 147 congressional Republicans who voted to overturn the 2020 election results.

Sessions previously served as the chairman of the House Republican Campaign Committee and as chairman of the Rules Committee.

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