

As Gaetz, McCarthy Feud Nears Climax, New Dems Say Speaker 'Not Trustworthy'

October 3, 2023 **by Dan McCue**



Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., pauses as he addresses reporters about efforts to pass appropriations bills and avert a looming government shutdown, at the Capitol in Washington, Friday, Sept. 29, 2023.(AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

WASHINGTON — As the showdown between Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., neared its climax on Tuesday, the chair of the largest coalition of Democrats in the chamber said the speaker is “simply not trustworthy.”

The written statement from Rep. Annie Kuster, D-N.H., chair of the New Democrat Coalition, came roughly 30 minutes before the House was set to take up legislative business on Tuesday.

The vote on McCarthy’s future is expected to come around 2 p.m.

“You are only as good as your word — and time and again, Speaker McCarthy has proven that he is not a man of his word,” said Kuster, whose coalition numbers about 100 members.

“While Republicans have lost their way, Democrats stand united in our purpose and our caucus,” she said.

“Leader [Hakeem] Jeffries, D-N.Y., continues to be the steady, forward-looking voice we need to lead our country forward,” she said. “New Dems are proud to stand with our leader and our caucus to deliver progress for the American people, not chaos.”

Gaetz filed his motion to vacate, a measure forcing a vote on whether to remove McCarthy from his post, Monday night.

Under the rules of the House, a vote must be held within two legislative days of the filing of the motion, and it must take priority over the rest of the chamber’s agenda, which currently includes negotiating a number of appropriations bills and the farm bill.

McCarthy agreed to allow any member to force such a vote during a protracted, 15-round floor fight in January as a concession to right-wing holdouts in exchange for the speakership.

Now, it will only take a simple majority vote to remove him, and Gaetz has said that if he doesn’t succeed Tuesday, he may well keep filing motions to vacate — perhaps even daily — until he succeeds.

There apparently is nothing in the House rules that could stop this from happening.

Gaetz’s filing ushered in another extraordinary day on a Capitol Hill that has been rife with them this year.

This is only the third time in the 234-year history of the House that a speaker has faced a motion to vacate.

The last time was in 2015, when Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., filed a motion against Speaker John A. Boehner, R-Ohio, who resigned from Congress before the House voted.

Prior to that, the only other time the process was used was in 1910, when Speaker Joe Cannon, R-Ill., faced a revolt from a dozen insurgent Republicans.

At the time, Cannon was seen as something of a tyrant by his fellow members and as an obstacle to every piece of progressive legislation introduced during an era when progressivism was at its peak.

But in a twist, it was Cannon who introduced the motion to remove himself in a bid to prove he still had the support of the majority of his conference. In the end, the motion failed and he remained speaker.

The Cannon House Office Building is named after him and a large display case in its basement holds many of his mementoes.

As for McCarthy, his options appear to be dwindling. He could move to table the resolution, which would kill it, at least until Gaetz refiled it.

Tabling the resolution would also require a majority vote of the House.

Less likely, but possible, McCarthy could refer the measure to a congressional committee, putting off a vote on the floor and leaving the question in limbo.

The one thing McCarthy desperately needs is what Kuster's statement seemed to deny him — support from House

Democrats.

Shortly after its release, the Democrats emerged from a two-hour meeting saying they would not bail the speaker out.

During the vote on the speaker in January, the entire Democratic caucus repeatedly voted for Jeffries, while McCarthy continued to try to appease his far-right members, mostly members of the House Freedom Caucus.

Since then Democrats have been angered by several steps the speaker has taken to continue to cater to the Freedom Caucus, including, evidently, going back on his promises related to the debt ceiling agreement forged with the White House in June, and launching an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden just last month.

If McCarthy is ousted, an interim speaker would be chosen from a list he and his staff have already prepared. The interim speaker would then oversee the election of a new speaker.

That would set off a scramble for leadership with the leading contenders appearing to be either Steve Scalise, R-La., the current House majority leader, or Rep. Thomas Emmer, R-Minn., the majority whip.

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