

Jordan Suffers Second Defeat in Speaker Bid, Opening Door to Empowering McHenry

October 18, 2023 by Dan McCue



Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON — Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, again failed to garner enough votes to be elected speaker on Wednesday, apparently opening the door to a bipartisan push to grant new powers to Speaker Pro Tem Patrick McHenry, R-N.C.

When the final votes were tallied, shortly after 1 p.m. Wednesday, Jordan had received 119 votes — one less than he got Tuesday; House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., had received 212; House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., had gotten seven; former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., five; and

Rep. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., three.

Reps. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., Tom Emmer (who is also House majority whip), R-Minn., Kay Granger, R-Texas, and Bruce Westerman, R-Ark., all received one vote, as did Candice Miller, who ran unsuccessfully to represent Michigan's 8th Congressional District in 2022, and former House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio.

McHenry has told his Republican colleagues he doesn't believe an expansion of his powers — which right now begin and end with presiding over the selection of a new speaker — would be legal unless Congress expressly authorized it.

Word on Capitol Hill Wednesday was that Rep. David Joyce, R-Ohio, is preparing to bring the resolution to the floor as soon as the second round of voting concludes, if Jordan doesn't prevail.

But for the moment at least, Jordan seems undeterred by his losses and said he will continue to work toward reaching 217 votes — the amount he needs to win the speakership — ahead of a third vote, now set for Thursday.

"We picked up some today, a couple dropped off, but they voted for me before. I think they can come back again. So we'll keep talking to members, keep working on it," he told reporters at the Capitol.

On Tuesday, during the first round of voting, 20 Republicans voted for someone other than the party's nominee.

Though Jordan and his allies worked feverishly last night to bring the dissenters in line, as members of Congress headed into the Capitol on Wednesday morning, even his staunchest supporters admitted he'd do worse in the second vote.

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Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Wash. (Photo by Dan McCue)

number of Republicans said while they'd continue to support Jordan on the second ballot, after that, they would be open to voting in favor of empowering McHenry in order to get the House open and functioning again.

Others were adamantly not of the same mind.

After the vote Rep. Mike Waltz, R- Fla., was among those who said he would continue to support Jordan as long as he remains in the race.

Asked how long the battle for the speakership might go on, Waltz said, "that's up to him [Jordan]. Remember, people were counting Kevin McCarthy out after the second round of voting in January, and we got there."

Waltz admitted the outcome of Wednesday's vote was discouraging to him as a Jordan supporter, but he went on to say, a-

“it’s also discouraging from the perspective of our needing a speaker. We need to move forward.”

But as far as Waltz is concerned, that doesn’t mean turning to McHenry.

“Remember, the [provision] creating the speaker pro tem position was literally written in secret to prepare us in the event there was a 9/11-style effort to decapitate the government,” he said.

“The position was conceived from the very beginning as having a limited role, and the reality is, in order to expand the power of that post, you’re going to have to compromise with the Democrats. As a Republican you really have to asked yourself whether that’s what the majority of our voters elected us to do.”

Daniels also rejected the expansion of McHenry’s powers out of hand.

“I support Jim Jordan. He’s our nominee, and I totally believe he’s going to be our leader,” Daniels told a throng of reporters gathered around him on the Capitol steps.

He then went on to say he would not support any resolution expanding the powers of the speaker pro tem.

“That’s not indicative of anything against Patrick, I have the most amount of respect for him,” he said. “But this body has to elect the speaker of the House, and I think we needed to be careful as we proceed through this period.

“I know members are frustrated and want to get back to work, but we cannot unveil these other side procedures for expedient’s sake. ... And that’s because in this town, once you unveil a side procedure, people tend to want to go back and do it again and

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Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla. (Photo by Dan McCue)

supposed to work.”

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, was if anything, even more animated about the matter.

“Never in the history of this institution — never, to the best of my knowledge — have we ever appointed a speaker pro tem with the full powers of the speakership without having elected a duly elected speaker,” Roy said.

“We have not done that ... and to do so would be playing games with an incredibly important position — one that’s third in line for the presidency,” he said.

“We should do our job and select a speaker. The Constitution says so. Any move to do otherwise would not only damage the

Republican Party, it would damage the House of Representatives. And I violently oppose any resolution that might come before the House on this issue.

“I mean, I believe what’s being talked about is directly contrary to the Constitution. I think what we need to do is step back and then do our job and elect a speaker, however long it takes,” Roy said.

While many agree with Roy that such a move would be unprecedented, after two weeks of chaos, a growing consensus seems to be forming around putting this chapter of history in the rearview mirror.

Already the dysfunction in the House appears to have claimed one Republican victim, Rep. Debbie Lesko, R-Ariz., who released a statement last night, announcing her retirement from the House.

Heading into Wednesday’s morning vote, Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Wash., said, “Today is all about finding a way to move forward, that’s the goal here.”

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Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md. (Photo by Dan McCue)

Kilmer, who spent four years as chair of a select committee to “modernize” the U.S. Congress, said after devoting so much time to “trying to strengthen this institution” it was dispiriting to see “someone pursue the gavel who has been called a “legislative terrorist” by his own side of the aisle.

“That’s not someone I’d be enthusiastic about holding the gavel,” Kilmer said.

As far as empowering McHenry, Kilmer said, “I think there’s an openness to that discussion.

“What that means and what the parameters of that would be, I think, remains to be seen, but we’ll see how it plays out.”

Rep. Jared Moskowitz, D-Fla., also appeared to be open to McHenry gaining more power, saying as he disappeared up the steps of the Capitol that the speaker pro tem “Is going to get a lot busier after today.”

Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., also seemed to favor a resolution that could put McHenry in the chair, but more than anything, he said he believed a bipartisan solution was the only way the current crisis in the House was going to be resolved.

“The extreme element of the Republican Party has now shut down the Congress for three weeks, since Sept. 1. Either by not voting for rules, by not being able to select a speaker, or whatever. And that’s not good for the American people,” he said.

“The only way we’re truly going to get Congress moving forward again is in a bipartisan fashion,” he said.

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Hardline Republicans, however, were already digging their heels in, saying they were opposed to anyone but Jordan as speaker.

Asked this morning about the McHenry scenario being floated on the Hill, Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., a member of the House Freedom Caucus, said flatly, “I don’t support it.”

Meanwhile, Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., who was walking with Biggs, dismissed any such move, calling it “a dangerous consolidation of power.”

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