



# Kevin McCarthy ousted as US House speaker by hard-right Republicans

**Former speaker confirms he will not run again as Republicans plan to hold a vote for a new speaker next Wednesday**

Joan E Greve, Tues, 3 Oct 2023 20.44 EDT

After leading a successful, bipartisan effort to avoid a government shutdown over the weekend, [Kevin McCarthy](#) on Tuesday was abruptly removed from his role as US House speaker, ousted by hard-right members of his own Republican party less than a year after his election.

The ousting of McCarthy represented the first time in US history that a speaker of the House has been removed from office, marking an ignominious end to a short and fraught tenure for the California Republican. It comes as Americans' approval ratings of Congress and the federal government remain [near historic lows](#), with a majority saying they have [little or no confidence](#) in the future of the US political system.

The infighting between Republicans effectively puts a halt to all business in the [House of Representatives](#) until the House, which has only a narrow Republican majority, elects a new speaker. McCarthy said Tuesday night that he would not run for speaker again, clearing the way for a new Republican speaker if the party members can reach a consensus.

Republicans plan to hold a vote for a new speaker next Wednesday, following a closed-door meeting on 10 October to discuss different candidates, Reuters reported.

The vote to oust McCarthy followed a motion to vacate the chair from the Florida Republican congressman [Matt Gaetz](#). After McCarthy's Republican allies failed to block the motion from moving forward, a final vote was held on Tuesday afternoon. Amid gasps from members in the tense chamber, eight hard-right Republicans joined 208 Democrats in supporting McCarthy's removal, as 210 Republicans tried and failed to keep the speaker in place. McCarthy needed a simple majority of voting members to keep his gavel but failed to cross that threshold.

"The resolution is adopted," congressman Steve Womack, the Arkansas Republican who presided over the session, announced after the vote. "The office of speaker of the House of the United States House of Representatives is hereby declared vacant."

McCarthy had sat stoically with his hands in his lap but when the vote finished, he threw his head back and chuckled at his own plight, as some members walked over to shake his hand.

Following the declaration, congressman Patrick McHenry, a North Carolina Republican, was designated by McCarthy as the acting speaker until a new House leader is elected. Upon taking the gavel, McHenry quickly called for a recess.

“In the opinion of the chair, prior to proceeding to the election of a speaker, it will be prudent to first recess for the relative caucus and conferences to meet and discuss the path forward,” McHenry said. House Republicans met Tuesday evening to regroup and finalize plans to, while Democrats will meet on Wednesday morning.

Some Republican leaders condemned McCarthy’s removal, with former vice-president and current presidential candidate Mike Pence suggesting it would undermine the GOP in the eyes of voters. “Chaos is never America’s strength and it’s never a friend of American families that are struggling,” Pence said at an event in Georgetown.

Former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich dubbed Gaetz an “anti-Republican” and called him “actively destructive to the conservative movement”, urging Republicans to vote to expel Gaetz from the House Republican conference.

Multiple Republican members of Congress [told CNN](#) that they expected to discuss whether Gaetz should be expelled from the Republican conference as a consequence for his behavior, though they did not say whether they personally would support the measure.

The eight Republicans who joined with Democrats to vote McCarthy out offered a range of reasons. South Carolina congresswoman Nancy Mace said McCarthy “has not lived up to his word on how the House would operate”, and argued that the chaos in Congress would be worse with McCarthy in charge than without him. “We need a fresh start,” she said.

Tim Burchett of Tennessee [told CNN](#) that McCarthy had “said something that I thought belittled me and my belief system” in a phone call. He said he was open to supporting several “honorable men” as McCarthy’s replacement, adding: “They’ve never openly mocked me, anyway.”

Speaking to reporters Tuesday night to confirm that he would not run for speaker again, McCarthy said: “I wouldn’t change a thing.”

“I leave the speakership with a sense of pride and accomplishment. And yes, optimism,” McCarthy said, citing Teddy Roosevelt’s quote about the man who [“fails while daring greatly”](#).

“I made history, didn’t I?” he said.

McCarthy dismissed the eight Republicans who voted against him, saying: “This country is too great for small visions of those eight,” and calling them “individuals” who were not “looking to be productive”. He noted that he had helped many of the Republicans who voted against him get elected in the first place, [quipping to a CNN reporter](#): “I should have picked somebody else.”

Gaetz had been motivated by a “personal” vendetta against him, related to the Congressional ethics inquiry into his behavior, including allegations of sexual misconduct, illicit drug use and misuse of campaign funds, McCarthy [told reporters](#). He said the Florida congressman was not a true conservative, and that [his goal had been to attract attention](#) and campaign donations. “We’re getting email fundraisers from him as he’s doing it,” [McCarthy said](#).

But the former speaker placed a larger share of the blame for the intra-Republican battle on the opposing party, saying: “I think today was a political decision by the Democrats.”

McCarthy chose not to run for speaker again after being ousted because he “was not going to negotiate with the Democrats to become speaker”, Republican congressman Kevin Hern told Reuters.

President Joe Biden urged the House to move quickly to elect a speaker, with press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre saying in a statement: “The urgent challenges facing our nation will not wait”.

McCarthy’s removal capped a tumultuous nine months in the House, defined by clashes between the speaker and the hard-right flank of his conference. Despite his repeated efforts to appease them, his willingness to collaborate with Democrats to prevent economic chaos sealed his fate. With the

narrowest of majorities in the House, Republicans now face the unenviable task of electing a leader who can win nearly unanimous support across a deeply divided conference.

Gaetz sought McCarthy's removal after the speaker worked with House Democrats to pass a stopgap spending bill, known as a continuing resolution, to extend government funding through 17 November. Gaetz also accused McCarthy of cutting a "secret side deal" with Joe Biden on providing additional funding to Ukraine, which has become a source of outrage on the right. McCarthy denied the existence of any secret deal.

The House and the US Senate passed the stopgap bill with overwhelming bipartisan majorities, averting a shutdown that could have left hundreds of thousands of federal workers without pay for an extended period.

Some Republican House members had condemned Gaetz in advance of the vote to oust McCarthy, calling him in interviews with CNN a "chaos agent", and "a fool or a liar", and raising concerns that the maneuver might cost Republicans their house majority.

Tuesday's vote was the first to remove a House speaker in more than 100 years and the first successful such vote in American history. Other recent House speakers, including former Republican leader John Boehner, had previously been threatened with a motion to vacate but never had to endure a full effort to remove them.

The referendum starkly illustrated McCarthy's tenuous grasp on the gavel since needing 15 rounds of voting to secure the House speakership in January.

McCarthy has never won the support of many Republicans to his right. Additionally, many of his fellow Republicans felt McCarthy did not secure their side sufficient concessions in the deal that averted the shutdown.

"The speaker fought through 15 votes in January to become speaker, but was only willing to fight through one failed [continuing resolution] before surrendering to the Democrats on Saturday," Bob Good, a Republican congressman from Virginia, said in a floor speech on Tuesday. "We need a speaker who will fight for something, anything besides just staying or becoming speaker."

Before McCarthy learned his fate Tuesday, the House Democratic leader, Hakeem Jeffries, indicated his caucus would not help McCarthy save his job. In the end, every present House Democrat voted in favor of ousting McCarthy.

"House Democrats remain willing to find common ground on an enlightened path forward. Unfortunately, our extreme Republican colleagues have shown no willingness to do the same," Jeffries said in a "Dear Colleague" letter sent Tuesday. "Given their unwillingness to break from [Make America Great Again] extremism in an authentic and comprehensive manner, House Democratic leadership will vote yes on the pending Republican Motion to Vacate the Chair."

With the speaker removed, all work in the House will grind to a halt until a new leader is elected.

Pramila Jayapal, Washington state representative and chair of the Congressional Progressive caucus, said to CNN that under McCarthy and the Republican majority, the House had "consistently been chaos, not to mention the division, the polarization, the racism. We don't take any pleasure in this."

*David Smith, Leonie Chao-Fong, Hugo Lowell and Lois Beckett contributed reporting.*