



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on November 23, 2023

Conservatives Feel Betrayed by Johnson Funding Bill, Fueling GOP Divisions

Mike Johnson is walking a tightrope.

The Republican congressman from Louisiana, who suddenly and surprisingly found himself elected Speaker of the House last month after a contentious inter-party battle within the GOP, has been painted by the mainstream media as the most conservative speaker in decades. But conservative House Republicans are skeptical as they see signs that have them wondering whether Johnson will follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Kevin McCarthy.



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Representative Dan Bishop (R-N.C.), a member of the staunchly conservative House Freedom Caucus, admitted that Johnson is in a “tough position” given current dynamics on Capitol Hill, but warned that, nearly a month into the job, Johnson’s grace period is essentially over.

“He’s got to find an opportunity to change the dynamics,” Bishop told [Politico](#). “If he can’t, he’s going to follow the same path of not just the immediately previous speaker but a series of them who have not really proved successful.”

The growing discontent among the hard-right wing of the Republican caucus is the result of Johnson’s recent decision to mirror McCarthy’s actions in partnering with Democrats to pass a government funding bill without spending cuts in order to avoid a shutdown.

The move, which won more Democrat votes than Republican ones, is essentially the same thing that prompted conservatives to oust McCarthy.

On Tuesday during a closed-door meeting, some Republicans reportedly made their frustrations known to Johnson, arguing that passing the funding bill allows spending levels set by Nancy Pelosi to continue on for several months, constituting a surrender to Democrats.

For the moment, however, disgruntled Republicans aren’t calling for Johnson’s removal — but they are weighing retaliation by other, more subtle means. For example, there’s talk of implementing a tactic used against McCarthy — that of sinking procedural votes in order to take the House floor hostage.

Freedom Caucus member Rep. Ralph Norman (R-S.C.) told Politico of that possibility: “There is a sentiment that if we can’t fight anything, then let’s just hold up everything.”

Johnson’s position is currently secured somewhat by the fact that he thus-far lacks the bad blood that characterized the relationship between McCarthy and congressional conservatives such as Matt Gaetz of Florida. The personal animosity arising from a perceived long line of betrayals by McCarthy ultimately reached a boiling point that culminated in Gaetz’ revolt against then-Speaker McCarthy.

With regard to the possibility of ousting Johnson the same way, Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-Va.) said, “There’s always that tension, but I don’t see that happening anytime in the near future. I think most



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people are willing to give him some time, but we need to see something different.”

Politico reported on the recent maneuvers in the House:

And asked whether he fears the funding fight makes his speakership any less secure, Johnson brushed it off: “I’m not concerned about it at all.”

He argued that he’s in a “different situation” than his predecessor, largely thanks to his spending strategy — which includes two funding deadlines intended to force Congress to consider individual spending bills, rather than a mammoth spending package. Johnson said Democrats first feared the idea, but he insisted it will change the way they approach funding. (The Freedom Caucus, which initially supported the two-step approach, later formally opposed it because it contained “no spending reductions, no border security, and not a single meaningful win for the American People.”)

... Still, the right flank remains mostly unconvinced by the Louisiana Republican’s pitch. Many worry that Johnson’s decisions on the stopgap bill are an early signal that he is less likely to fight for their priorities heading into January and February.

Sources familiar with the going-on in the Capitol say the GOP caucus is more divided now than when McCarthy was at the helm. On one hand, conservative hard-liners want Johnson to take a more combative stance to ram through right-wing policies and stymie Democrat efforts where necessary.

On the other hand, RINOs (Republicans in name only, particularly those in district where Biden won in 2020), united and emboldened by the speakership ordeal (during which they sunk the speaker candidacy of Freedom Caucus favorite Jim Jordan), are asserting their interests as well, declaring that they will push back if leadership tries to make them vote on issues that would make them susceptible to accusations of extremism back home.

These RINOS have made clear they will gladly work with Democrats in order to get their way — something that could have enormous consequences for the balance of power in the House.

Rep. Don Bacon (R-Neb.), a RINO responsible for killing the possibility of a Jordan speakership, said of his conservative colleagues’ tactics: “It just forces us to work with Democrats — these guys play checkers, they don’t play chess.”

“You’ve got everybody acting as an independent agent rather than acting in a uniform way,” Rep. David Royce (R-Ohio) said in summing up the situation.

Given these divisions, is it only a matter of time before the Republican caucus explodes into another leadership battle?



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