



McCarthy Elected Speaker After 15 Rounds of Voting. What Now?

In the end, Kevin McCarthy failed to get 218 votes, but was elected Speaker anyway. Deploying a parliamentary trick allowing McCarthy to win and those unalterably opposed to him to save face, six GOP lawmakers-elect voted “present,” which lowered the majority threshold for McCarthy from 218 to 215 votes. McCarthy then received 216 votes in the historic 15th round of voting, and his speakership was assured.

Following his election, McCarthy presided over the swearing in of members of Congress and other necessary pomp, before delivering his agenda-setting speech in the wee hours of the first Washington weekend of the new year.



Newly elected Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy (AP Images)

Republicans have always been good at saying the right things, and McCarthy’s speech was no exception. He pledged as his first act to pass legislation defunding Biden’s infamous 87,000 new IRS agents, noting that government should work for the people, not “go after” the people. He promised, among many other things, to set up a bipartisan House committee to investigate Communist China and its malign influence in American affairs. He promised to re-open the “people’s house” to the public after two years of a closed gallery — a line for which, like most of McCarthy’s speech, stony-faced Democrats sat on their hands.

Only time will tell whether McCarthy’s promises are the usual GOP bromides to be set aside at the first sign of Democrat opposition, or whether the long and contentious process of electing a Speaker is, in fact, a sign of genuine reforms to come. We at *The New American* have learned to take Republican promises with a grain of salt. But the tumultuous, even rancorous debut of the 118th Congress may possibly betoken some genuine change. As several speakers noted during the many rounds of voting, this is how popular government is supposed to work; openness and conflict, not secrecy and unity, are the hallmarks of good government in a republic. Democrats, on the other hand, never tired of pointing out how unified and orderly their caucus was, in contrast to their unruly GOP opposition — as if unity in government were the highest aim.

In truth, unity, secrecy, and efficiency in government are always the tokens of tyranny. The government of China is nothing if not united, its deliberations secret, and its decrees unopposable. The meetings of its governing bodies are always models of decorum and consensus. But praising a government or party for unity and order amounts to the old canard about fascists making the trains run on time. They do indeed — but, as Hitler’s millions of exterminees found out too late, their destination is often not to their passengers’ liking.

So we will embrace the superficial disorder and even dysfunction on display during this historical



Written by [Steve Bonta](#) on January 7, 2023

contest. We would remind our readers, and Democrats everywhere, that the messiness of this event was not a patch on the chaos and uncertainty of historic events like the Constitutional Convention of 1787 — whose heat produced a light for the ages.

Certainly there is change in the wind. The events of the last few days would have been unthinkable a couple of decades ago, before there was a Freedom Caucus, and when the only principled voice for freedom in the House was Ron Paul. The fact that we now have several dozen Ron Paul-esque congressmen in the House bodes well for the future, and argues that our longtime strategy of educating the electorate is working.

But we know that talk is cheap, and hope that the elements of the House GOP caucus who resisted McCarthy's rise will hold him to account, and that the Speaker himself will work within the limits of his power to effect real systemic change. We understand that a mess that has been decades in the making cannot be undone in a day, or even a single congressional term. But we are cautiously optimistic that the events of this week signal something momentous, that at long last, the ship of state is starting to change course for the better.



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