

As House Republicans deadlock on speaker, Senate Republican leader backs Ukraine war bill

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The US House of Representatives descended further into chaos Friday as the latest Republican nominee for speaker, ultra-right Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio, lost a third roll-call vote, with some 25 Republicans refusing to support him. Jordan was then removed as the speaker nominee in a secret ballot of the House Republican Conference, by a margin of 112-86—more than four times the number opposing his candidacy in private than in public.

The conference will hold a candidates' forum for new candidates for speaker on Monday, with the prospect of a series of contentious secret ballot votes in which some candidates will withdraw or be eliminated. As of Sunday night, nine Republican representatives had announced their candidacy for the nomination.

The two candidates with the largest initial blocs of supporters are Majority Whip Tom Emmer and Kevin Hern, chair of the Republican Study Committee, the largest factional grouping, with more than two-thirds of the party's House membership. Emmer has the backing of former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy but is considered unacceptable by the fascist right because he voted to certify the 2020 election of President Joe Biden, rejecting the claims by Donald Trump of a "stolen election." Hern has never run for a leadership position before.

There were multiple reports on the bitterness of the conflict within the Republican conference, and threats of violent retaliation were made by supporters of Jordan, with intimidating phone calls and messages on social media to the families of Representatives, who had voted against him in the three roll-call votes he lost.

Representative Don Bacon of Nebraska spoke publicly about his wife sleeping with a loaded gun in their Omaha-area home. Representative Marianne Miller-Meeke of Iowa said she had received "credible death threats." There

were similar reports from Drew Ferguson of Georgia, Nick LaLota of New York, Jen Kiggans of Virginia, Ken Buck of Colorado, Steve Womack of Arkansas, and John Rutherford and Carlos Gimenez of Florida.

Jordan's closest supporters in Congress practically gloated about this campaign of intimidation. Representative Warren Davidson of Ohio said the fault lay not with Jordan's supporters but with the representatives who had voted against him. The harassment "will continue as long as people oppose Jordan for speaker," he told Jake Sherman of *Punchbowl News*.

Scott Perry, chair of the far-right Freedom Caucus, dismissed the threats. "All of us in Congress receive death threats. I don't know if that's a newsflash for anybody here. There are people out in the world that dislike us and threaten us. That's nothing new. It's nothing new to any member of Congress. We all know it," he told *Mediaite*.

Despite the focus in the media coverage on the personalities involved, with lengthy analyses of the defects of Jordan and the missteps of his campaign for the speakership, the central political issue has begun to emerge more clearly: It is the demand by the military-intelligence apparatus, backed by the Democratic Party and the Republican political establishment, for a massive new package of military aid to Ukraine.

This was the issue that led the Democratic Party in the House to unanimously oust McCarthy from the speakership in early October, supporting a "motion to vacate" brought by eight fascist Republicans who were opposed to McCarthy's decision to back a bipartisan "continuing resolution" to keep financing the federal government after the end of the fiscal year on September 30.

McCarthy has repeatedly questioned the need for

unlimited US military aid for the Ukraine war, declaring as long ago as last December, before he had even assumed the office of speaker, that he did not favor a “blank check” for the war against Russia. He was regarded as unreliable on this central issue in US foreign policy.

The centrality of money for the US-NATO war against Russia was underscored by the unusual intervention of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell Sunday, who appeared on two network interview programs, “Face the Nation” on CBS and “Fox News Sunday,” to argue in favor of the \$105 billion military spending package unveiled by the White House on Friday.

McConnell normally shuns the Sunday interview programs, and this was his first such appearance since he suffered two stroke-like episodes during the summer, in which he appeared to freeze up entirely while answering questions at press briefings. His actions Sunday were that much more extraordinary.

He told the CBS program that he supported Biden’s decision to bundle Ukraine and Israel aid together in an effort to win more Republican support. Asked about the opposition of some House Republicans to this combination, he replied, “I just think that’s a mistake.” He continued, “I mean, I know there are some Republicans in the Senate, and maybe more in the House, saying Ukraine is somehow different. I view it as all interconnected.”

He declared that the bulk of the aid for Ukraine was actually spent on expanding the capacity of the US arms industry. “We’re rebuilding our industrial base,” he said. “The Ukrainians are destroying the army of one of our biggest rivals. I have a hard time finding anything wrong with that. I think it’s wonderful that they’re defending themselves.”

After outlining this cold-blooded rationale for encouraging a war that has taken some half a million lives, McConnell concluded that on foreign policy, he and Biden are “generally in the same place,” except for the Biden administration’s policy of negotiating with Iran.

While McConnell denied, for the record, any preference in the choice of a new House speaker, his embrace of aid to Ukraine and his praise for Biden’s foreign policy amounted to a clear statement that a semi-isolationist like Jim Jordan is unacceptable and that the next speaker must be considered a “safe pair of hands” by the Pentagon and CIA.

While such issues are generally discussed behind the scenes, the public wrangling among House Republicans is likely to reach a new peak on Monday, as the conference

hears from as many as nine announced candidates, some, like Emmer and Hern, with sizeable support, others largely unknown even to the other members of their caucus.

An effort to give the speaker pro-tem, Patrick McHenry, interim power to call up bills and schedule them for votes, proposed by McCarthy and Jordan to the Republican conference last Thursday, collapsed after the House Freedom Caucus and a section of the leadership—including Emmer and Majority Leader Steve Scalise—objected that this would require the votes of some Democrats and would therefore amount to establishing coalition rule in the House.

Nonetheless, McHenry made it clear that the infrastructure for such a temporary expedient was still in place, and he connected it directly to the need for additional funding for the military and border security. He told reporters Friday that while the absence of a speaker meant legislation could not come to a vote, committees were still operating.

“On the national security front, we have fully constituted committees. Committees can still work, and they are working,” McHenry said, noting that the chairs of the Intelligence, Appropriations, and Armed Services committees “are all working.” He continued, “I want to thank the administration for their briefings on the supplemental request for national security. ... Our committees are working with the administration. And the goal there for our committees is to be ready to respond legislatively once we have a duly elected Speaker of the House.”

In other words, the first order of business for the House of Representatives, whatever the eventual outcome of the conflict over the next speaker, will be to push through the military package proposed by the White House.



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