

The Curse of the House Speaker's Chair: Chaos within the Republican Party

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While the Republican contenders swish and sway through the presidential race with mixed success, their recent engagements of the GOP on the Hill can only be described as disastrous. Much of this centres on one of US politics most important positions: that of the House Speaker. John Boehner (R., Ohio) had promised to resign, effective from October 30, leaving the Republicans to fight it out as to who would actually fill the soon vacant seat.

On Thursday, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.) took his hat out of the ring as a contender, feeling that he would be unable to farm a sufficient number of votes from the House Freedom Caucus. "By refusing to give Kevin McCarthy the maybe 10 to 15 votes he needed to get to 218 [the minimum needed if all House members vote for the speaker] they decided to leave John Boehner serving as speaker." Those words by Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R., Fla.) summed up a certain mood, one amply reflected by the divine guidance McCarthy was wishing for after he and his wife prayed.[1] God, it seemed, had better things to do.

The reasoning behind his demise is put down to the debilitating factors that affected Boehner himself. The camp of no compromise remains the shackle the party has to deal with, a sort of repetitive fanaticism that finds solace in ideology over practice.

Even ahead of any vote, McCarthy was facing promised resistance from the GOP hardline which has decided to regard Washington as a city of chronic blockages rather than agile movement. The shock jock circuit, involving radio talk show hosts and various conservative groups, were digging the trenches in the electorates, hoping to trip up Boehner's potential successor.

McCarthy's position against a wholesale government shutdown was further compounded by a stumble of veracity on the Benghazi hearings regarding Hillary Clinton. McCarthy had let the cat out of the bag of political tricks, cutting to the issue about what the primary aim of the hearings was: political, a weapon designed to lower Clinton's popularity. "Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right? But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a special committee, what are her numbers today?"[2]

In letting this particular mask fall, McCarthy did himself few favours in attempting to win back voices within the dogmatic fold. "Being unable to hold the line when it comes to conservative bullshit," poses Amanda Marcotte, "is mandatory for a modern Republican who wants to hold office." [3]

The result of this withdrawal has moved the shiny, conspicuous light of interest in the

direction of Paul Ryan (R., Wis.), the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. According to Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), “He’s really the only one that can do the job”. Ryan, however, is treating the position as a poisoned chalice best avoided – for the moment.

From the hardline perspective, the speaker’s role has been distinctly one of terrier-like qualities with a barrel scraping IQ, evading options of keeping business going on in Washington while being fashionably reactionary. In what must be an amusing spectacle to officials from other developed, let alone developing states, the scratching nature of US politics on the nature of borrowing limits to fund government expenses must seem an odd one.

Shutting down a government and effectively starving it of funds is something that the GOP, in its most extreme practice, have made its own during the Obama years. Much of the business surrounding Boehner centred on the reminder from the Treasury Department that Congress had to raise the federal government’s borrowing limit by November 5. Current funding expires on December 11, and lawmakers have been absorbed by the pure procedural nature of getting a two-year budget deal.

The GOP illness regarding the Speaker’s chair goes back to last year when Eric Cantor, then House Majority leader, found himself on the losing end of a challenge in his suburban Richmond district from local economics professor David Brat. Cantor was seen as the unofficial speaker-in-waiting, someone to slide effortlessly into the seat once Boehner vacated the position. Instead, Cantor became the first sitting majority leader to lose a primary since the position’s creation in 1899 (*The Atlantic*, Jun 10, 2014).

It was also the scale that stunned US politics watchers, not to mention some in the GOP who felt that Tea Party hyperventilating was on its way out. With 97 percent of the vote countered, Brat could positively become one with 56 percent, leaving Cantor dry at 44 percent. This was Tea Party activism renascent, one dressed up in the faux anti-establishment rhetoric championed by such voices of admirable delusion as Ann Coulter.

The Brat success also signalled to various hardline lawmakers within the GOP that a reactionary stance over such policies as immigration reform might not be such a bad thing. The art of compromise was seen as the prose of surrender, given that Cantor was himself someone suspected of shedding the credentials that made him lead the sabotaging effort against the 2011 debt-limit deal. That ingenious effort by the GOP establishment crippled Washington’s budgetary position sufficiently well to warrant a downgrade in the country’s credit rating.

A statement from McCarthy’s office does a good job of distilling the self-destructive mood in the GOP. “Over the last week it has become clear to me that our conference is deeply divided and needs to unite behind one leader. I have always put the conference ahead of myself.” The options for his replacement are few and far between.

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Notes

[1]

<http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/425255/report-mccarthy-out-leadership-race-eliana-johnson>

[2]

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kevin-mccarthy-admits-benghazi-comment-was-a-gaffe_56152

[b14e4b0cf9984d7c207](https://www.salonsocialflow.com/2015/10/08/now_what_the_gop_is_screwed_kevin_mccarthys_exit_shows_that_anyone_smart_enough_to_lead_will_be_too_smart_to_want_the_job/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=socialflow)

[3]

http://www.salon.com/2015/10/08/now_what_the_gop_is_screwed_kevin_mccarthys_exit_shows_that_anyone_smart_enough_to_lead_will_be_too_smart_to_want_the_job/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=socialflow

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