

Ex-Ally Cites Betrayal for McCarthy Vote

BY ELIZA COLLINS

When eight Republicans voted to take down Kevin McCarthy as speaker, seven of the votes weren't a surprise. But one—from South Carolina Rep. Nancy Mace—sent a gasp through the House chamber.

Unlike the other Republicans who joined all Democrats to vote against McCarthy on Tuesday, Mace is no hard-line conservative. She justified her vote by saying McCarthy hadn't brought up legislation he had promised he would, including a measure that would increase access to birth control, and echoed dissidents' complaints that he broke his pledges on spending bills.

"Promises that I was made were not kept. I have been working very hard on very specific issues for a very long time. When you shake a hand and make a promise, you ought to keep it," Mace said in an interview Wednesday.

Mace, 45 years old, has been seen as a rising star within the party. A charismatic lawmaker who regularly gives media interviews and is aggressive on social media, she sometimes elicits eye rolls from fellow Republicans who feel she is too eager for attention. At the same time, they acknowledge she is a talented member who held on to a tough seat.

Mace has been vocal about how the party could win back the moderate Republicans and independents turned off by former President Donald Trump. She has wide appeal in her district, with a focus on fiscal conservatism and social moderation.

The lawmaker has been advised that she needs to shore up her support from conservatives to have a chance, according to people familiar with the conversations.

Mace, the first female graduate of the Citadel military academy, was a star recruit in 2020 when she flipped the Charleston area district from a Democrat, helped by her compelling personal story. She had



Rep. Nancy Mace, a favorite of leadership who had been recruited by McCarthy, seen in the Capitol on Tuesday.

dropped out of high school and earned her diploma while working at a Waffle House.

She won her first congressional race by campaigning on promises of fiscal responsibility, but with a willingness to break with her party when needed. She said that is what she did Tuesday when she voted to oust McCarthy.

McCarthy's allies see Mace's vote to oust him as the most stinging of the eight, given she was a favorite of leadership and had been recruited by McCarthy, according to a person familiar with the matter. The former speaker, for his part, accused Mace of lying. "I bite my lip. I let people say things that are not true. But it's not right," he said after his ouster Tuesday.

He said he had spoken with Mace's chief of staff ahead of the removal vote, and that the aide assured McCarthy he had kept his word as it related to

Mace's requests.

Asked to respond to that account, Mace said: "It was sad to see him fall apart the way he did last night." She said she and the aide in question were drinking together at a nearby bar while McCarthy gave his press conference.

Mace may have angered her colleagues but the next speaker will still need her vote. Her opposition to McCarthy underscored that while his sharpest critics were among the hard-right members of his party, other members had soured on him as well. Now, she could be an influential vote.

She said she had heard from Rep. Jim Jordan (R., Ohio) and she was working on setting up a meeting with Rep. Steve Scalise (R., La.), the majority leader. Both have announced a run for the post.

Might the next speaker hold a grudge over her vote against

the party's former leader? "They can't afford to, the majority is so slim," she said.

Mace said that she was hearing some colleagues were making demands to the candidates for speaker that she and the other rebels be punished for their vote, including the possibility of being kicked off committees or removed from the GOP conference entirely.

She posted her response on social media: "The GOP is supposed to be the party of free speech and diversity of opinion. If kicking one of your strongest female voices off committees or out of the conference is how you want to show that, bring it."

Her decision Tuesday punctuated an extraordinary falling out between two former allies. McCarthy had supported Mace through her competitive races. Mace returned the favor by mostly siding with the GOP on contentious votes.

Former Santos Aide Pleads Guilty

BY JAMES FANELLI
AND CORINNE RAMEY

A former campaign treasurer for Rep. George Santos pleaded guilty to conspiring with the congressman to defraud the U.S. in a scheme that falsely inflated his campaign's fundraising numbers in order to qualify for a Republican program that provided support for candidates.

Nancy Marks, who appeared in federal court on Long Island on Thursday afternoon, is the first person in Santos's orbit known to have pleaded guilty. The plea places additional pressure on the New York Republican as he runs for reelection while fighting his own fraud charges.

A charging document alleges Marks conspired with Santos to submit a bogus filing to the Federal Election Commission during the 2022 election cycle that falsely claimed at least 10 members of their families had made large political donations to his campaign. The inflated numbers allowed Santos to show that his campaign had raised at least \$250,000 from donors in a single quarter, a key threshold to reach in order to qualify for the program that provided additional funding to campaigns, prosecutors allege.

Marks and Santos plotted about the scheme over text messages, including one where he learned what he needed to do to qualify for the program, prosecutors said.

"We are going to do this a little different. I got it," he wrote in one text to Marks and another campaign worker, according to the charging document.

At a later date, Marks and Santos also falsely reported to the Federal Election Commission that Santos had loaned his campaign \$500,000, even though he didn't have means at the time, prosecutors said. The

In 2022, Mace dispatched a Trump-endorsed rival in the GOP primary, and cruised to victory in the general election. While Republicans nationally took back the House majority, they won fewer seats than hoped. In the Senate, they lost a seat, a result attributed in part to GOP moves to restrict abortion after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

Mace has shifted alliances before. She worked for Trump's 2016 campaign and ran her 2020 race focused on his policies.

Mace said Trump's actions on Jan. 6, 2021, "wiped out" his legacy.

Three years later, Mace is considering endorsing Trump for president, and her name is being thrown around as a potential running mate. She has said she would be interested in the job if it were offered, people familiar with her thinking have said.



Slate of Candidates for House Speaker Takes Shape

BY KATY STECH FERREK

Several Republican lawmakers are looking to be the next speaker, after the House ousted Rep. Kevin McCarthy. A vote is expected as soon as next week.

To win support, the speaker candidates will rely on personal connections as well as staking out positions on GOP priorities such as tightening border security, stepping up the impeachment investigation into the Biden family's finances and cutting government spending.

Announced names

Steve Scalise (R., La.) Represents coastal district that

includes New Orleans suburbs. Joined Congress: May 2008

Scalise, 58 years old, who ranks as the No. 2 House Republican as majority leader, is seen as a conservative who built good relationships with members of different viewpoints as the party's GOP whip from 2014 to 2022. Colleagues say his personal relationships throughout the party could help unify its deep divisions. In 2017, he was shot at a baseball practice for Republican lawmakers and had to learn to walk again. He noted this week that he felt good despite being treated for blood cancer.

In a letter to his Republican colleagues asking for their support, Scalise said he helped advance bills on increasing

American energy production, securing the U.S.-Mexico border and giving parents a larger say in education issues.

Jim Jordan (R., Ohio) Represents district northwest of Columbus. Joined Congress: January 2007

Jordan, 59, has worked to advance policies on the far-right spectrum of conservative ideology and is close with former President Donald Trump. He helped found the House Freedom Caucus in 2015. Later, he became a close ally to McCarthy. He is chairman of the Judiciary Committee, which is leading one of several impeachment investigations into President Biden and his family's finances. Unknown is whether he could get support from the

party's center-right members. He planned to run but hasn't formally announced.

In a letter to his Republican colleagues, Jordan touted helping the House pass a strict border-security bill, holding the Biden administration accountable through his Judiciary Committee work and calling for fiscal discipline.

Possible candidates

Kevin Hern (R., Okla.) Represents Tulsa and its suburbs. Joined Congress: November 2018

Hern, 61, leads the Republican Study Committee, a broad group of conservative members that takes policy positions on issues such as defense, the economy and fiscal restraint. Hern told lawmakers

What about Trump?

Some House conservatives have floated the idea of nominating Trump for speaker. The former president said Wednesday that he is focused on his 2024 presidential bid. But on Thursday Trump told Fox News Digital that he would accept an interim role as speaker while Republicans settle on a replacement.

The speaker doesn't have to be an elected member, though current rules could bar Trump from serving because of his recent criminal indictments.

—Alex Leary
contributed to this article.

In a Cavelike D.C. Studio, Bannon Sows Chaos

By ANNIE KARNI

Offering Guidance and an Unfiltered Outlet for Hard-Liners

WASHINGTON — On Wednesday morning, two Republicans who hours earlier had toppled Kevin McCarthy as speaker of the House made a well-worn trek to a 19th-century brick townhouse a few blocks away from the Capitol and entered the cluttered sanctuary of Stephen K. Bannon's recording studio.

now gripping the Republican Party, capitalizing on the spectacle to build his own following and using his popular podcast to prop up and egg on the G.O.P. rebels.

Mr. Bannon has spent years promoting the lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from former President Donald J. Trump, railing against coronavirus mandates and what he refers to as a "criminal invasion of the southern border." His obsession of late was toppling Mr. McCarthy and taking out what he describes as "uniparty" Republicans who have become indistinguishable from Democrats.

With Mr. McCarthy's historic

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Representatives Matt Gaetz of Florida, the instigator of the rebellion, and Nancy Mace of South Carolina, one of seven other Republican defectors, huddled with Mr. Bannon for a morning meeting ahead of a joint appearance on his "War Room" podcast.

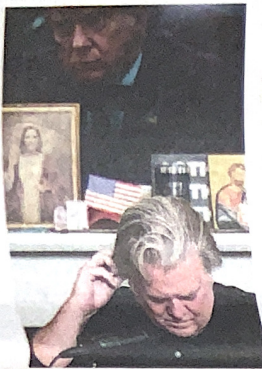
"Tectonic plate shift here in the imperial capital," Mr. Bannon told his listeners at showtime, while directing them to donate to his guests online. "We must stand in the breach now. We have to lance the boil that is K Street in this nation."

From this cavelike studio not far from where Congress meets, Mr. Bannon, the former Trump adviser, has been stoking the chaos



ERIN SCHAFF/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Stephen K. Bannon, the former Trump adviser, helped strategize the ouster of the House speaker.



★ Bannon (money & base) Sows Chaos From Studio Near Capitol

From Page A1

downfall this week, his wing of the party has claimed its most prominent trophy.

Mr. Bannon represents a clear through line from the grievance-driven MAGA base to Congress. And his role in the meltdown that played out this week in the House helps explain why the Republican Party appears to be eating its own.

He is a vital part of a feedback loop of red-meat media hits and social media posts, online fund-raising and unfettered preaching to an often angry and fervently right-wing base that rewards disruptions and detests institutions.

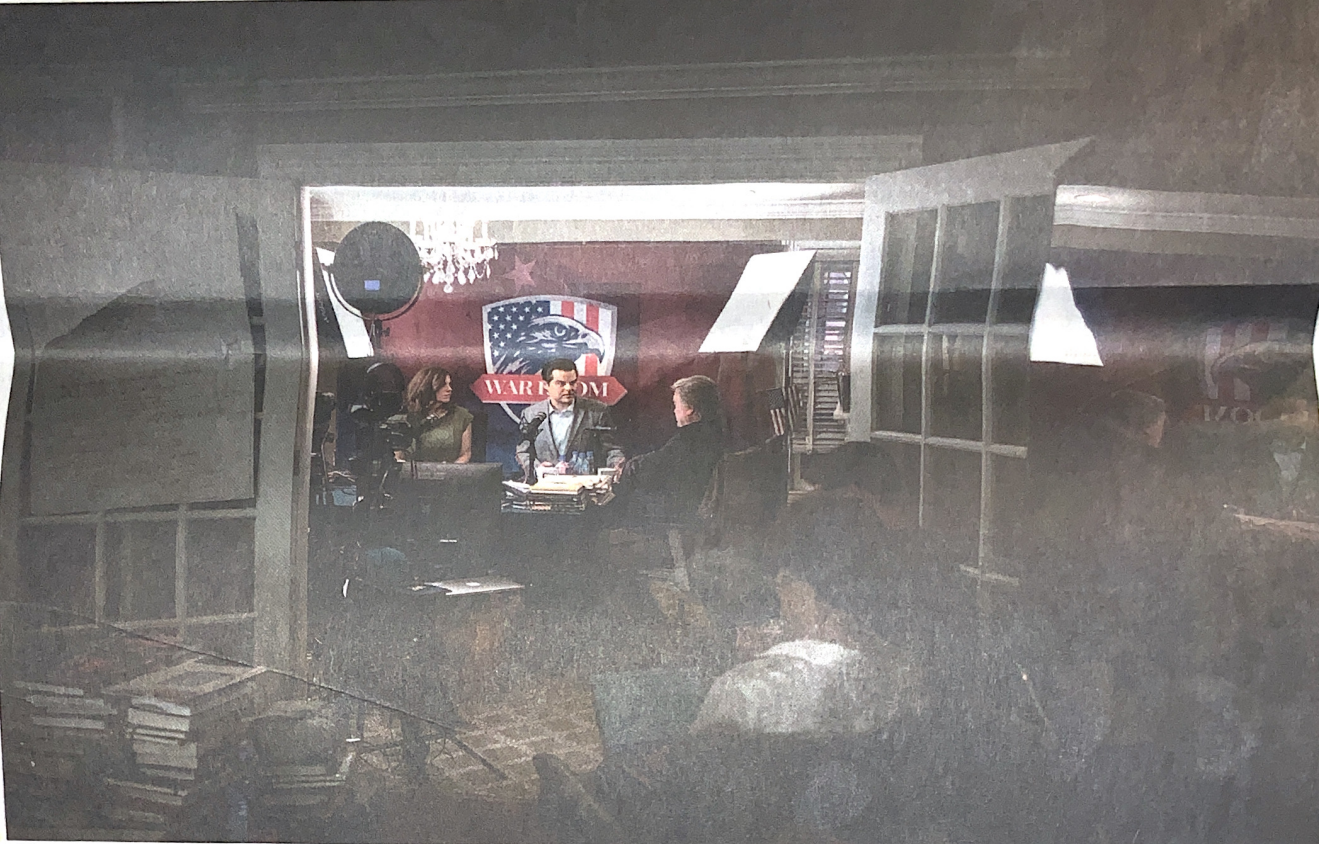
In past decades, right-wing rebels on Capitol Hill have encountered trouble getting real traction — shunned by lobbyists and big-money political action committees, excluded from leadership suites in the Capitol and disregarded by Fox News. But with the help of Mr. Bannon, who streams live for four hours every weekday, Mr. Gaetz and others don't need to rely on any of that.

Mr. Bannon casts the agitators as heroes to his devoted MAGA acolytes, and helps boost their small-dollar fund-raising. He participates in calls with members and donors. He offers strategic advice. He hounds Fox News hosts who he argues don't give them a fair shake. But mostly, he offers an unfiltered platform where individual rabble-rousers can speak directly to the base, known on "War Room" as "the posse," creating more incentives for them to wreak havoc on the House floor.

For weeks, Mr. Bannon has been strategizing with Mr. Gaetz on the bid to take down Mr. McCarthy, offering himself up as a sounding board as Mr. Gaetz plotted his moves.

"KABOOM," Mr. Bannon texted a reporter on Monday night, minutes after Mr. Gaetz filed his long-dangled motion to oust the speaker.

He has also encouraged hard-right lawmakers to use the House floor to yank legislation as far to



Representatives Nancy Mace and Matt Gaetz joined Stephen K. Bannon on his podcast after the House speaker vote. "It was really ugly last night," Ms. Mace said.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIN SCHAFF/THE NEW YORK TIMES

the right as possible — earning themselves media attention in the process. His advice to them: "Get an amendment. Make it as outrageous as possible. Just be on there — don't worry if you're not on Fox — we'll cut it, we'll play it." On Wednesday, Mr. Bannon introduced his guests on his podcasts as the "architects and heroes of yesterday" and gave them airtime to make a fund-raising pitch.

"I do need help because they're coming after me," said Ms. Mace, who represents a politically competitive district. "They've threatened to dry up all my money. I've had multiple members, previous to the vote last night, threaten to withhold fund-raising if I took this vote. It's a huge amount of pressure. They call your staff, they scare them." Twice, Mr. Bannon cued her to spell out her campaign website so that listeners could find it.

His audience is still wary of Ms. Mace, a fiscal conservative who leans toward the center on some social issues and voted to hold Mr. Bannon in criminal contempt for defying a subpoena from the Jan. 6 committee.

But Mr. Bannon sees her as a gift. Her vote to oust Mr. McCarthy allowed him and his cohorts to push back on the notion that it was only an angry group of ultra-MAGA hard-liners who had lost faith in Mr. McCarthy.

"Nancy is not a hard-right intransigent lawmaker," Mr. Gaetz

said on the show. "Nancy is a fiscal hawk."

Ms. Mace has previously called Mr. Gaetz a "fraud" and accused him of opposing Mr. McCarthy because he wouldn't defend him against "allegations that he sex-trafficked minors."

But all of that appeared to be water under the bridge the morning after Mr. McCarthy's ouster. They were, at least temporarily, allies. On Wednesday, they sat

Stoking a fervently right-wing base that rewards disruptions.

next to each other in Mr. Bannon's basement, where books about China, Trump and sensible weight loss programs live in messy piles on any flat surface that avails itself. Notes from Mr. Trump written in his trademark Sharpie ("Steve! Your show is sooooo great — Proud of you! Donald!") sit stacked with other miscellany.

The group was still digesting the historic events of the previous day, while figuring out their next moves. They decided, together, to use Wednesday's broadcast to look ahead, rather than to "dunk" on the former speaker.

"He was punching down; it was really ugly last night," said Ms.

Mace, whom Mr. McCarthy targeted at his evening news conference, suggesting she was lying when she claimed he had not kept his word.

During commercial breaks, they mulled who might be the next speaker, but there was no clear answer. "I asked Jim Jordan on the floor yesterday, you're going to be the next speaker?" Ms. Mace said. She turned to Mr. Gaetz with an idea. "Want to go meet with any of them today, together?" Like, Scalise or Jordan or anyone?" He was noncommittal.

Mr. Bannon was, too. "I'm just going to see how it develops," he said. "Who's got the stones to take on the apparatus?" Mr. Gaetz has described himself to people as a "Bannonite tribalist."

Mr. Bannon, for his part, is in awe of Mr. Gaetz, whom he compares to Daniel Webster. He credits the Florida Republican with recognizing early on last year how helpful a slim G.O.P. majority could be to the hard right.

"He sat right here in July and talked about how we weren't going to have a 30- or 40-seat majority, but that was actually going to be better," Mr. Bannon said. "We were going to have leverage. He's a very special guy."

Many of the newer rebels in Congress have relied on Mr. Bannon for backing as they look to make their own mark.

Representative Lauren Boebert of Colorado said she was grateful

to him for recently offering her a slot on his show to talk about the southern border, rather than to rehash her embarrassing evening at "Beetlejuice."

"Steve is an actual trusted source, he understands that my one personal night out does not impact the work that I've been doing for four years," she said. "Steve understands the base and what the base wants. I don't go on there for the donor aspect, but I'm grateful when folks do chip in."

Mr. Bannon's name is often greeted with an eye roll, even among Trump loyalists. He's seen by some as a man who has made the wrong bet on candidates, like the failed Senate candidate in Alabama, Roy Moore, and has an inflated sense of his own influence. He was charged with defrauding donors who were giving money to build a wall along the southern border, before being pardoned by Mr. Trump. He was sentenced to four months in jail for criminal contempt of Congress for defying a subpoena and is free while he appeals the conviction.

But last week, as Mr. Bannon's cohort debated amendments to the annual military spending bill on the House floor, Mr. Bannon was glued to C-SPAN like a proud stage parent.

"This is red meat," Mr. Bannon exulted, as Representative Matt Rosendale of Montana defended an amendment that would prohibit mandatory coronavirus vaccines for service members, refer-

ring to the vaccine as an "experimental drug."

Mr. Bannon, an unrepentant agent of chaos, admits he was spoiling for a government shutdown.

"You create a firestorm now that totally changes things," he said. "People right now think government is a benefit. I'm going to show government spending as cootie-infested."

Mr. Bannon is also famously temperamental. He has turned on former friends, like Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, for backing Mr. McCarthy during the speaker's race and on the debt ceiling deal. She has been blacklisted from the show for months.

But after she said she was opposed to any spending bills that included aid to Ukraine, Mr. Bannon said he was warming back up to her. "There's always a path back," he said.

On Wednesday morning, Mr. Bannon and his guests tried to temper their glee.

"Do not allow the posse to get punch drunk," Mr. Gaetz said on the show. There was more work to do.

Mr. Gaetz and Ms. Mace stayed for three segments of the show, until it was time for Mr. Rosendale to pick up the mantle and fire up the base.

"I'll talk to you later today," Mr. Bannon said as Mr. Gaetz showed himself out.

★ Gaetz Is a Divisive Figure In Congress, and at Home

This article is by *Kalyn Wolfe, Patricia Mazzei and Colbi Edmonds.*

PENSACOLA, Fla. — He is polarizing in Washington and polarizing at home. And in both places these days, he is getting more attention than anyone might expect, given his lack of seniority and thin legislative record.

As Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida orchestrated the ouster of Speaker Kevin McCarthy on Tuesday, constituents in his overwhelmingly Republican district had plenty of thoughts about their congressman's actions and suddenly robust national profile.

"If we got rid of the speaker of the House, hopefully we get someone in there who doesn't make backdoor deals with Democrats," said Sandra Atkinson, the chairwoman of the Republican Party of Okaloosa County, adding that Republicans were proud of him for following through on his word.

Critics in his district saw a political moment that was about ego and ambition and little more.

"He is following through on using chaos as both a performative art — that phrase is overused but it's true — and because he's frustrated he's not getting his own way," said Phil Ehr, a Democrat who ran against Mr. Gaetz in 2018 and is now running for the U.S. Senate. "In some ways, he's acting like a petulant child."

Yet for all of his time spent picking fights — and, his critics say, little time crafting legislation — Mr. Gaetz remains broadly popular in his district, a stretch of the western Florida Panhandle, where he won re-election last year by nearly 36 percentage points. His skirmishes in Washington, and a

Kalyn Wolfe reported from Pensacola, Fla., Patricia Mazzei from Miami and Colbi Edmonds from New York. Susan C. Beachy contributed research.

federal investigation that revealed embarrassing details about his private life, have done little to bruise him.

"There's a lot of people who like Matt Gaetz," said Joel Terry May, 67, a local artist, as he showed off a painting in downtown Pensacola to visitors from New Orleans. "He speaks for the people, and he speaks out."

Mr. May, who grew up in Alabama, remembers a time when former Gov. George C. Wallace visited his school back in the 1960s.

"People didn't like George Wallace nationally, but the people who elected him and represented him did," he said. "That's what Gaetz also understands. When you represent somebody, you want them to maintain the feel of the people. People want to see Washington work. They want their representatives to have a pulse on the area."

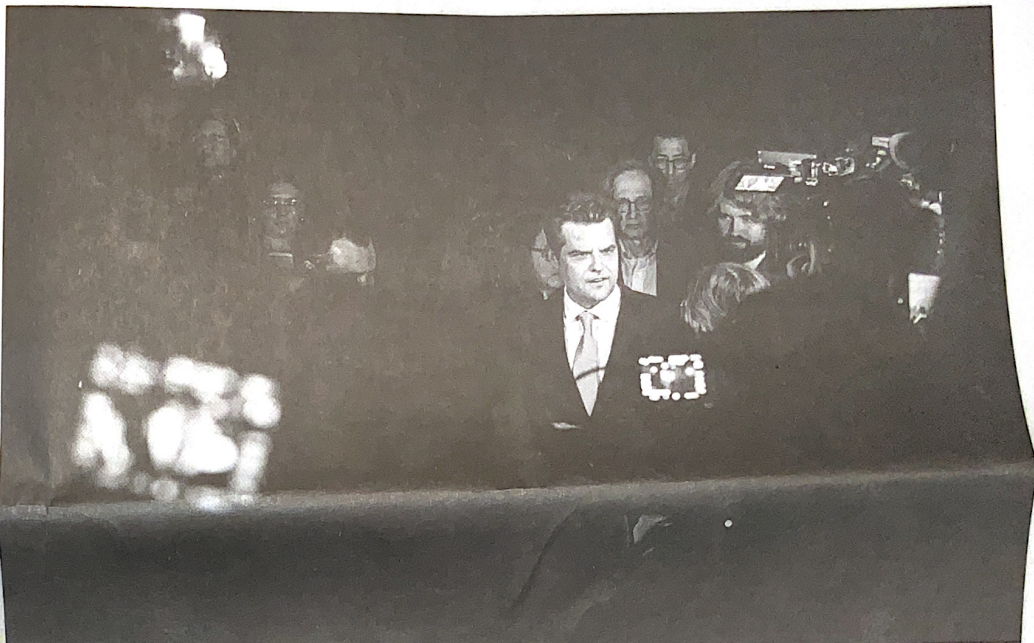
Mr. Gaetz is widely disliked by his peers in Congress but is grudgingly acknowledged to be smart and crafty, and certainly a master of drawing attention to himself.

Mr. Gaetz was re-elected last year while under the cloud of an investigation in a federal sex-trafficking case that ultimately resulted in no criminal charges against him. (A congressional ethics review is pending.) Twice, women have been arrested after throwing their drinks at him.

Now, his support for a far-right posture that could shut down the federal government — directly affecting many of the people he represents — is unlikely to dent him, his critics acknowledged.

"He is loved by the First Congressional District," said Mark Lombardo, who unsuccessfully challenged Mr. Gaetz in last year's Republican primary.

Mr. Lombardo attributed his loss, among other things, to Mr. Gaetz's family ties — his father,



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Some in Representative Matt Gaetz's district say his ousting of the House speaker was a move about his ego. Others praise him for it.

Don Gaetz, is a wealthy and well-known former president of the Florida Senate who on Monday filed to run for the Senate again after stepping down in 2016 — and his devotion to former President Donald J. Trump. Mr. Gaetz is one of Mr. Trump's closest allies in Congress and has backed him for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination over Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida.

"He was Trump, Trump, Trump, Trump, Trump," Mr. Lombardo said of the congressman, "and the First District is all about Trump."

No other congressional district in the country has as many military veterans, a group that could

have been badly hurt by a shutdown. Yet even his critics concede that Mr. Gaetz remains popular among them.

Barry Goodson, 70, a registered Democrat and retired Army veteran who once helped organize people against a plan backed by Mr. Gaetz to privatize some of Northwest Florida's sandy white beaches, said he worried that his health care providers at the Department of Veterans Affairs would suffer under a shutdown.

"I still can't understand why Gaetz hates negotiating rather than working out something for the people in the district," he said. "A chaos agent is not good for

public policy," said Samantha Herding, a Democratic national committeewoman in Walton County. "It's not good for getting highway funds, education and veterans' affairs."

And Mr. McCarthy's ouster left even some fans of Mr. Gaetz with questions about exactly what had been accomplished.

John Roberts, chairman of the Escambia County Republican Party, said that Republicans, even those typically sympathetic to Mr. Gaetz's views on other policies like immigration and the national debt, generally supported keeping Mr. McCarthy as speaker.

"It's not like we're mad at Matt

Gaetz; he's still a good congressman," he said. "But I think this was probably the wrong move."

But as the House smoldered and shook, other backers of Mr. Gaetz said they were all in.

Tim Hudson, 26, a lifelong Pensacola resident, has voted for Mr. Gaetz. Upon learning on Tuesday about the congressman's successful ouster of Mr. McCarthy, Mr. Hudson offered only more praise.

"That just makes me support him even more," Mr. Hudson said.

He added that the ouster of Mr. McCarthy "speaks to how the world really is right now. We're tired. We're fed up. We want to see people start getting things done."

★ Two Contenders for House Speaker Race to Cobble Support, but in Trump's Shadow

By **LUKE BROADWATER**

WASHINGTON — The two leading candidates to become the next Republican speaker of the House worked the phones and the halls of the Capitol on Thursday, vying for support from within their party's fractured ranks as the chamber remained in a state of paralysis after the ouster of Representative Kevin McCarthy of California.

Representatives Steve Scalise, the majority leader, and Representative Jim Jordan, the Judiciary Committee chairman, had each landed more than a dozen endorsements by the afternoon as they raced toward a vote of Republicans tentatively scheduled for Tuesday. An election on the House floor could follow the next day, though the process could stretch much longer if no consensus can be reached.

Far from the Capitol, former President Donald J. Trump, whose far-right acolytes in Congress helped lead the rebellion that has plunged the House into chaos, threatened to weigh in him-

self in what could become an epic struggle.

Mr. Jordan picked up an important G.O.P. backer and cleared a potential challenger from the field with the endorsement of Representative Byron Donalds of Florida, who had previously been exploring his own run for speaker, according to a person familiar with his calls to lawmakers. On X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, Mr. Donalds said that Mr. Jordan "has my full support to become the next Speaker of the House!"

Mr. Scalise and Mr. Jordan are faced with the difficult challenge of trying to unite a fractious Republican conference that is reeling after Mr. McCarthy's removal from the speakership.

For Mr. Jordan, an Ohioan and co-founder of the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus, the task will be to convince more mainstream Republicans that he can govern and not simply tear things down. He met on Thursday with members of the Main Street Caucus, a group of business-minded Republicans.

For Mr. Scalise, a Louisianian who has won conference elections

before as majority leader, the challenge will be to stay one step ahead of Mr. Jordan and make better inroads with the right wing of the party.

Both men are considered further to the right than Mr. McCarthy, a point Representative Matt

The top candidates in a G.O.P. contest are seen as being to the right of McCarthy.

Gaetz of Florida, who led the drive to oust Mr. McCarthy, has noted with a sense of satisfaction.

"If it's Speaker Jim Jordan or Speaker Steve Scalise, there will be very few conservatives in the country who don't see that as a monumental upgrade over Speaker McCarthy," Mr. Gaetz said on Newsmax.

Casting a long shadow over the race is Mr. Trump, the G.O.P. presidential front-runner who holds heavy sway among congressional

Republicans because of his strong standing with the party's base, including many of their constituents.

Some right-wing Republicans are encouraging Mr. Trump to make a run for speaker himself, though the party's current conference rules would block him from doing so because he is under multiple felony indictments and facing the possibility of significant prison time. Even so, Mr. Trump's allies have floated the idea that he might visit the Capitol next week to raise the possibility of a run or otherwise weigh in on the race.

"I've been contacted by multiple Members of Congress willing to support and offer nomination speeches for Donald J. Trump to be Speaker of the House," Representative Troy Nehls of Texas wrote on the X platform. "Next week is going to be HUGE."

Speaking outside a Manhattan courthouse where is facing a civil fraud case, Mr. Trump seemed to enjoy dangling the possibility, telling reporters: "Lot of people have been calling me about speaker. All I can say is we'll do whatever is best for the country and for the Republican Party."

"If I can help them during the process," he added, "I'll do it."

Back in the halls of the Congress, a serious race was taking shape.

Mr. Scalise, who has been in leadership since 2014, has built relationships across the Republican conference. He has been quietly securing commitments through one-on-one calls with members.

On such calls seeking support, Mr. Scalise has emphasized that he is second only to Mr. McCarthy in fund-raising prowess, and he has locked up a string of commitments from the South and the Midwest, according to a person familiar with his private calls, who described them on the condition of anonymity.

"Not only is Steve a principled conservative, he has overcome adversity far beyond the infighting in our conference right now," said Representative Ashley Hinson of Iowa, who endorsed Mr. Scalise after speaking with him.

One clear point of contrast between Mr. Scalise and Mr. Jordan is their dueling positions on continued aid to Ukraine for its war against Russian aggression, which has become increasingly

politicized and is now regarded by many Republicans as toxic.

Mr. Jordan was one of 117 Republicans who voted last week against continuing a program to train and equip Ukrainian troops, while Mr. Scalise sided with 101 Republicans in supporting it.

"Why should we be sending American tax dollars to Ukraine when we don't even know what the goal is?" Mr. Jordan said Thursday on Fox News. "No one can tell me what the objective is."

Several Republicans said they were waiting to hear more from the candidates before deciding whom to support.

Representative Marc Molinaro of New York said he had spoken with both Mr. Scalise and Mr. Jordan by phone.

"There really wasn't any one person in Congress who worked harder to help me get to Congress or to earn my support than Kevin McCarthy," Mr. Molinaro said.

"We now have individuals who have a week," he added. "And so I'm going to observe, I'm going to listen, and I'm going to demand that members like me and the people we represent have a seat at the table, and then make a decision."

Robert Jimison contributed reporting.

(Jordan?)