



U.S. NEWS

Funding, Aid Top New Speaker's To-Do List

Johnson takes over GOP negotiating duties with major deadlines looming

By Kristina Peterson
and Lindsay Wise

WASHINGTON—The House is back open for business. But getting legislation through it—much less agreeing with the Democratic Senate and President Biden—won't be easy for brand-new Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, with major deadlines less than a month away.

After 22 days of GOP infighting, the Louisiana Republican secured his post on Wednesday without any opposition from his fellow House Republicans. That unity will be tested soon, with lawmakers facing a slew of policy and political challenges, including a government-funding deadline in three weeks, aid requests for Israel and Ukraine and a farm bill that has already expired.

It will mark the first time that Johnson will be the top negotiator with Democrats on behalf of a group of Republicans still divided over both ideology and political tactics.

"In terms of being able to effectively legislate in divided government—that part of this job is going to make getting elected speaker look kind of easy," said Rep. Steve Womack (R., Ark.), a longtime member

of the House Appropriations Committee.

Johnson met with Biden in the Situation Room at the White House on Thursday, a person with knowledge of the matter said, and attended a briefing with administration officials and other top lawmakers about Biden's foreign-aid and border request. The meeting at the White House included congressional leadership of both parties, and key committee chairs and ranking members. Later, Johnson met with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.).

The most immediate deadline facing Johnson is the expiration of the government's funding on Nov. 17. In a letter sent to House Republicans this week, Johnson mapped out a timeline for immediately bringing the GOP-crafted spending bills that haven't yet passed the House up for votes.

But because the House will need to reach an agreement with the Senate and White House—widely seen as infeasible for all 12 bills within the next three weeks—Johnson said House Republicans may need to buy themselves more time by passing a stopgap spending measure that would continue current funding levels either into mid-January or mid-April, depending on Republicans' preference. The goal would be to eliminate pressure that often compels Congress to pass a massive spending package in a rush before Christmas.



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson addressed reporters at the Capitol on Thursday.

"We all understand that our next Speaker must be prepared to negotiate from a position of strength with the Democrat-controlled Senate and White House," Johnson wrote in the letter.

Such stopgap measures have been fiercely opposed by the hard-right flank of the House GOP conference, fueling some of the anger toward former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.). Many lawmakers believe Johnson will have a little more leeway in November with conservatives who celebrated his ascension to power this week.

Rep. Chip Roy (R., Texas) said he would be open to a short-term spending patch in service of a longer-term goal of reducing federal spending. "It just depends on how it's structured, framed and whether it's tactical," he told reporters.

While some lawmakers held out hope they would be able to pass and negotiate individual spending bills before the mid-November deadline, others acknowledged that was unlikely. "If you think somehow we're going to be able to wrap everything up in three weeks-ish, yeehaw. God bless you," said Rep. Mark Amodei (R., Nev.).

Democrats said that so far, the individual spending bills passed with GOP support in the House aren't getting them closer to a viable bipartisan compromise. "There's a view that we can do these individual bills the way we were doing before this chaos—I think that's futile," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut.

One unusual dynamic that could complicate spending negotiations is a provision included as part of last summer's debt-limit deal that says if the government is being funded by a stopgap spending measure on Jan. 1, automatic across-

the-board cuts known as a sequester would kick in, hitting the military. The provision would cut current spending by 1% beginning in April 2024.

Johnson will also have to contend with complicated intraparty dynamics in navigating the Biden administration's request for \$106 billion in emergency funds for Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and the U.S. border. There is broad bipartisan support in Congress for aid to Israel. The first measure Johnson brought to the House floor on Wednesday was a resolution affirming support for Israel and condemning Hamas that passed 412-10.

But some Republicans are skeptical of new funding for Ukraine, and have suggested it may need to be paired with tighter border security and changes to immigration policy. Johnson voted against \$300 million in security assistance to Ukraine in September.

A group of Republican senators introduced a stand-alone bill Thursday that would send billions of dollars in aid to Israel but not Ukraine, underscoring challenges Biden faces.

"If the Biden administration's case for additional Ukraine aid is not strong enough to stand on its own, then packaging them is an insulting request to lay before Congress," said Sen. Mike Lee of Utah, one of the sponsors of the measure.

—Andrew Restuccia
contributed to this article.

DREW ANGER/GETTY IMAGES

Republicans Have New Leader, but Problems Aren't Any Different

By CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — Newly installed Speaker Mike Johnson is confronting a multitude of crises during his first days in office, chief among them a deadline just weeks away to avert a government shutdown and an urgent request from President Biden for a behemoth \$105 billion aid bill for Israel and Ukraine.

They are two of the issues that have most bitterly divided the House Republican conference and helped lead to the ouster of his predecessor. Now it falls to Mr. Johnson, a fourth-term congressman who has never served in a top leadership position before, to try to keep his anti-spending party united and the government open — all in a matter of weeks.

The previous speaker, Kevin McCarthy, found it impossible to corral recalcitrant Republicans to pass legislation to keep federal funding flowing and prevent a politically and economically damaging shutdown. At the last moment, he turned to Democrats to push through a bill to extend the deadline through Nov. 17, a move that prompted hard-right Republicans to force him out.

Mr. Johnson was among a majority of Republicans who opposed that stopgap spending bill. He has also opposed continued aid for Ukraine for its war against Russian aggression, and he said on Wednesday that he wanted to see “conditions” imposed on additional U.S. aid.

As he sought the speakership in recent days, Mr. Johnson has also

Luke Broadwater and Carl Hulse contributed reporting.

suggested that he would back a temporary measure to keep government funding flowing through January or April to allow more time to pass all 12 individual annual spending bills, a key demand of the hard right. But he has not said what spending levels he would favor.

In the days leading up to the government shutdown deadline in September, Mr. McCarthy put forward a stopgap measure that severely slashed spending. Twenty-one conservative lawmakers opposed it, tanking the bill and declaring that they would not vote for a temporary funding measure under any circumstances.

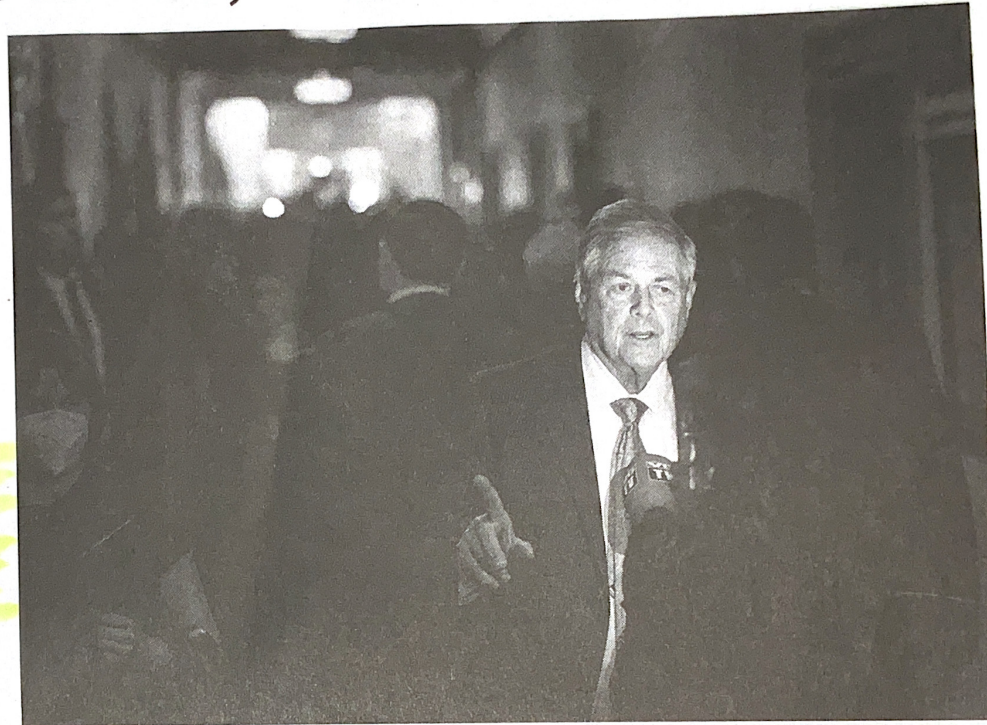
Representative Ralph Norman of South Carolina, a member of the Freedom Caucus, suggested that the hard-right flank of the party would be inclined to give Mr. Johnson more leeway on spending than they gave Mr. McCarthy because they trust his conservative bona fides.

“He doesn’t start from the position of way up and go up,” Mr. Norman said of Mr. Johnson and federal spending. “He starts from the position of up and goes down.”

“The problems with McCarthy,” he added, “started with one word: trustworthy.”

Yet Mr. Norman also said he wanted to see a temporary spending bill that slashed spending to prepandemic levels — something that could never pass the Democratic-controlled Senate or be signed by Mr. Biden. That would violate the agreement Mr. McCarthy struck in June with the president to suspend the debt ceiling and cap federal spending.

“Extremist funding bills that



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Representative Ralph Norman said the hard-right flank might give Mike Johnson some leeway.

make cuts way below the bipartisan June agreement will not fly,” said Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the majority leader. “If Speaker Johnson tries to send those cuts over here, they’re not going to happen. They’ll be dead on arrival. All they will do is waste more time at a moment when every day counts.”

Mr. Schumer continued: “I told Speaker Johnson the exact same thing I told Speaker McCarthy: In

a divided government, the only way we’ll fund the government or pass supplemental is bipartisanship.”

Mr. Johnson will face another test as Congress considers the Biden administration’s funding request for Israel and Ukraine — a \$105 billion package that could end up getting folded into a stopgap funding measure. The Senate, where the measure is far more popular, is holding a hearing on

the aid package next week, and Mr. Johnson was at the White House on Thursday to be briefed on it.

In September, when lawmakers were racing to try to avoid a government shutdown, a bipartisan Senate stopgap plan included \$6 billion for Ukraine. But Mr. McCarthy stripped the aid from his plan, recognizing the sharp decline in Republican support for sending more federal dollars to

A conservative must now find a way to pass spending bills he had opposed.

Kyiv. Democrats swallowed the plan in the interest of keeping the government open, arguing that Congress would return to the issue and pass a larger aid package later in the year.

It is not clear how Mr. Johnson, who has voted repeatedly against sending additional aid to Ukraine, plans to handle the emergency spending request. He has expressed strong support for aiding Israel in its fight against Hamas.

And asked by a reporter on Wednesday night if he supported sending additional aid to Ukraine, Mr. Johnson replied, “We all do.”

But he added that his backing would not be absolute. “We’re going to have conditions on that,” Mr. Johnson said. “We want accountability and we want objectives that are clear from the White House.”

The hard-right members of his party have already declared the measure dead on arrival.

“For the House GOP under Speaker Mike Johnson this is an obvious HARD NO,” Representative Chip Roy of Texas, an influential anti-spending conservative, wrote on social media. “We will not join Israel and Ukraine, we will not throw money at the border, & all supplementals must be paid for — as a starter. Game on.”

Brawl for the Speakership Reveals a Party Carefully Toeing the Trump Line

Election Deniers Still Hold a Grip Over the G.O.P.

By SHANE GOLDMACHER

Representative Mike Johnson of Louisiana had just survived a closed-door vote to end a tumultuous period of paralysis without a House speaker on Tuesday night and was celebrating with smiling and exhausted Republican colleagues.

"Democracy is messy sometimes," he said, "but it is our system."

But moments later, Mr. Johnson was confronted at a news conference about his own past role in American democracy, when he worked in alliance with former President Donald J. Trump to block the certification of the 2020 election.

Boos rang out at the reporter's inquiry. Mr. Johnson closed his eyes and shook his head. "Shut up! Shut up!" one congresswoman shouted. "Next question," Mr. Johnson said.

Only hours earlier, the speakership bid of another candidate, Tom Emmer, the majority whip, had been felled amid a lobbying blitz from Mr. Trump himself. Among Mr. Emmer's apparent apostasies: certifying President Biden's election. His tenure as speaker designate lasted only four hours.

Then, on Wednesday, when Representative Pete Aguilar, a Democrat, chastised Mr. Johnson for leading efforts to reject the Electoral College votes on the House floor in 2020, one Republican lawmaker shouted back, "Damn right!"

The back-to-back-to-back developments on Capitol Hill underscored not only the extent to which loyalty to Mr. Trump has become a prerequisite to taking power in today's Republican Party, but also how — two and half years after a riot that left the Capitol covered with blood and broken glass — the greater sin inside the G.O.P. is to have stood with the voters that day and certified the election of Joseph R. Biden.

"Bottom line is the Trump wing of the House is dominant and has been dominant for some time," said former Representative Charlie Dent, a moderate Republican from Pennsylvania. Mr. Dent called Mr. Johnson "affable" and "bright" but said the political takeaway was clear: "A member of the Trump populist wing is now speaker."

Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida, a Trump ally who filed the motion that took down former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, beamed. "This is what victory feels like," celebrating Mr. Johnson's rise on Steve Bannon's "War Room" podcast on Wednesday before the official floor vote. Mr. Gaetz called him "MAGA Mike Johnson" — the same moniker that the Biden campaign used hours later.

At a New York courthouse, where he and his company are on trial for financial fraud, Mr. Trump himself praised Mr. Johnson. "I



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The emergence of Mike Johnson of Louisiana as the speaker of the House showed just how far the shadow of the former president extends over the Republican Party.

think he's going to be a fantastic speaker," the former president said Wednesday.

The internal politics of House Republicans do not revolve solely around Mr. Trump. The former president had publicly backed Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio for speaker earlier this month, only to see him blockaded by a more moderate faction in the conference.

But the end of the three-week paralysis shows that the party remains yoked to the former president's election denialism, with Mr. Johnson's selection by his Republican colleagues coming on the same day that one of Mr. Trump's former lawyers tearfully pleaded guilty in a Georgia racketeering case related to Mr. Trump's attempts to overturn the election.

"If I knew then what I know now, I would have declined to represent Donald Trump in these postelection challenges," said Jenna Ellis, a once-combative Trump attorney who is now cooperating with Mr. Trump's prosecutors. Prosecutors struck deals

with two other Trump figures, Sidney Powell and Kenneth Chesebro, in the last week.

It was a different story on Capitol Hill.

With Mr. Trump dominating polls in the 2024 presidential primary — and even his top rivals

Conservatives exult after beating back a faction of moderates in the House.

staying relatively silent on his election fraud falsehoods — the party appears content to look past the fact that many of the party's most prominent election deniers lost in key swing states such as Arizona and Pennsylvania in the 2022 midterm elections.

For many Republicans, the primary victories that preceded those defeats are as politically sig-

nificant. Last year, Mr. Trump sought to methodically cleanse the party of his critics, especially those who had voted to impeach him after the Jan. 6 riot. He mostly succeeded: Only two of the 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach him survived.

In contrast, Mr. Johnson served on Mr. Trump's impeachment defense team. And before that he recruited House Republicans to sign onto a legal brief to object to the outcome of the 2020 election. When that failed, he had played a key role in articulating a rationale for Republican lawmakers to oppose certification of the 2020 results on the floor. His guidance did not directly echo Mr. Trump's wild allegations and was narrower in scope, but it led to the same final vote.

"We know now it's too high of a hurdle to be directly criticized by Donald Trump" and still become speaker, said Kevin Sheridan, a veteran Republican strategist. Referring to Mr. Johnson, he added, "He seems to have found the right temperature for the porridge so

far."

But Jenna Lowenstein, executive director of Informing Democracy, a nonprofit devoted to vote counting and election certification, said she was "very concerned" about Mr. Johnson's ascent.

"As a member of the House, Johnson was willing to use the powers of his office to try to obstruct a fair election and interfere with certification," she said. "And we have to assume he would do the same with the broader powers of the speakership."

Mr. Johnson has served as vice chairman of the Republican conference and was previously the chair of the conservative Republican Study Committee. He is initially expected to be a more policy-minded leader than Mr. McCarthy, who was best known for his backslapping personality. Mr. McCarthy also objected to certifying the election and visited Mr. Trump in Mar-a-Lago only weeks after the attack on the Capitol, in a trip that was widely seen to restore some legitimacy to the for-

mer president.

An evangelical Christian, Mr. Johnson has vocally opposed abortion and gay marriage. (During the roll call vote in which he was elected as speaker, Representative Angie Craig, Democrat of Minnesota, pointedly declared, "Happy wedding anniversary to my wife!" to Democratic applause.) Democrats were quick to highlight some of his hard-line stances.

Elected to the House in 2016, the same year that Mr. Trump won the presidency, Mr. Johnson, a former constitutional law attorney, will have the least years of House experience of any speaker in many decades. But he is representative of the wave of House Republicans who have served in Washington only since the party was reshaped by Mr. Trump — and who are now a majority of the conference.

"If you don't have a coup on your résumé," Charlie Sykes, the Trump-tired editor in chief of *The Bulwark*, wrote in a column about the speakership fight, "don't bother to apply."