

CNN Special Coverage: The Speaker Vote

01/03/22

1:18:05 p.m.

3 minutes and 56 seconds

DANA BASH: And there are a lot of members in that chamber who are voting right now who are voting to support Kevin McCarthy. These are Republicans, but are telling me and I'm sure a lot of you guys here that a big problem that Republicans have is one that they have had for the last 12, 15 years since the Tea Party started and it's that these extremes, small band of extremes have successfully taken over the leadership and that perhaps what we saw this morning with McCarthy actually yelling back at them for the first time in a public way that they're hoping that the fever breaks. It's unclear if that will happen but that is a dynamic that could play out as we're seeing something so historic.

JAKE TAPPER: Let me bring in former Congressman Rodney Davis of Illinois because, Congressman, it seems your friend, Kevin McCarthy, is headed to defeat on this first ballot. Obviously people could change votes before the gavel comes down but right now he is 11 votes back from where he needs to be or — or rather seven votes back from where he needs to be, he can only afford to lose four, he lost 11 right now. And what do you make of the argument that McCarthy set this stage for this to happen himself by being tolerant of this ultra-right-wing, MAGA group that is, by the way, in some analyses, the reason why there wasn't a red wave because there were too many far right candidates as opposed to more traditional conservative Republicans like yourself?

FORMER CONGRESSMAN RODNEY DAVIS (R-IL): Well, I'll tell you what, candidate quality matters and, in the end, we didn't have the right candidates in the right districts to win the general elections to increase our margins. But this isn't a Kevin McCarthy issue. This has been happening for years. It happened under Speaker Boehner, happened under Speaker Ryan. When we were in the minority we were more unified than ever because we were fighting against the Democrats. We forgot we were fighting against their majority-driven institution. These guys don't want to get to yes. They don't want to help McCarthy. However, if Kevin McCarthy stays in this race and we go to ballot after ballot after ballot, there's going to be a lot of pressure on them because their voters sent them here to hold Hunter Biden and Joe Biden accountable. They're not going to have Jamie Comer as the chair of the Oversight Committee. They're not going to have — they're going to have Jim Jordan as the chairman of the Judiciary Committee until we get a speaker of the house.

TAPPER: You think that voters sent the Republican majority to the House of Representatives to hold Hunter Biden accountable?

DAVIS: In their districts —

TAPPER: Yeah.

DAVIS: — their very Republican districts, absolutely. But we won the majority by winning

districts that were won by Democrats. That were won by Joe Biden. Look, I represented a swing district for ten years. I know what that general election fight's like. These guys have absolutely no idea.

TAPPER: Yeah, Abby Phillip, I mean, maybe it's true that there are a lot of voters out there who are in these 11 districts who think that the business of Congress is to investigate Hunter Biden. But I don't know that that's a winning formula for House Republican.

ABBY PHILLIP: Yeah, I don't think there's any evidence that, especially these members who are part of the Never Kevin caucus or what have, you really took away that message from the last election because they're in districts where that wasn't a factor. They were running in districts that were ruby red, a combination of just partisanship and — and redistricting and so they don't have to deal with that. But I think part of the problem here is that even if it's not a Kevin McCarthy that we're talking about, this could be anyone. It is very hard to ideologically meet these members where they are.

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1:26:15 p.m.

2 minutes and 17 seconds

TAPPER: We should note, Kasie Hunt, the reason he didn't get it way back when in 2015 — was it?

KASIE HUNT: '15.

TAPPER: Was because — not because he was inadequately allegiant to MAGA or too much of a swamp monster or any of the stuff being told about him, no, it was because he was maladroit. He was clumsy. He admitted that the Benghazi hearings were all about trying to destroy Hillary Clinton.

HUNT: Right. Well, I mean, and look, our politics have changed so much since then. Now, those are said out loud all the time and sort of taken for granted. It's almost rather quaint he had to step down from his bid for the speaker over that in 2015 but, look, it's important to pull out the lens here and think about, like, big picture what's going on here because, what did we learn from the midterm elections where they thought this was going to be a red tidal wave sweeping through the House of Representatives, a real change election that rejected complete Democratic control of Washington? Instead what we got was a message from voters that actually they want a little bit of stability. And they're looking for people who are going to kind of maintain the status quo, that that feeling of being sick of the up and down roller coaster that was the Trump administration for four years, there's still some feeling out there among the American electorate that, you know, we need to kind of get back to governing to actually functioning and what's happening right now today is really putting on display the fact that Republicans are not capable of governing. I mean, I thought this would happen repeatedly through two years of Republican control whether it was — I don't know, Dana, how many hours we spent, you know, on government shutdowns in 2013 or

whenever that was. There's the debt ceiling fight, et cetera, my sense was that this was going to be governing from crisis to crisis because of this group in the House. I never expected that it would be so bad that, right out of the gate on the very first day of the Congress, that for the first time in 100 years it looks like they won't be able to choose a speaker and that sends a message to the American public that, you know, Republicans are not in a place right now where they are capable of governing the country. They are simply not. I mean, we'll see if they prove that they can figure it out but right now, this display is poor if you're gauging it based on, hey, can you pull the levers of government to make them function and work for the American people.

(...)

2:47:31 p.m.

1 minute and 29 seconds

JOHN KING: And Jim Jordan knows as well as anybody, he may be a member sometimes, an unruly member of that herd, he knows what it's like — the chaos in the House. So, do you want to manage that? Do you really want that number one job because of the responsibilities that come with it or do you want to be the bulldozer going after Hunter Biden, going after Joe Biden, going after cabinet members, trying to impeach them. So, I think this does conflict Jim Jordan. Is he ambitious? Does he want power? Absolutely. Does he — has his dream always been to be bulldozer in chief investigator? Yes. So, the question is a lot of them are going to have to look in the mirror. There are six or eight potentials. Jamie smartly mentioned the more centrist Republicans, the more pragmatic, governing conservatives. They don't want Jordan as their speaker.

BASH: No.

KING: They think he's trouble.

BASH: That's why I said I don't —

KING: So, can he get to 218?

BASH: — to 2018.

KING: I don't think —

JAMIE GANGEL: No.

KING: — he can get there either. Would he like to get to 218? Look, everybody on that floor is ambitious. Everybody on that floor might change their mind if, suddenly, I have 50 votes for you. But the challenge is going to be, Kaitlan mentioned, would it come outside the House? Eventually, Kevin McCarthy's argument to the insurgents has been you are embarrassing the party, you are embarrassing yourself, you're embarrassing the institution. You're making us look like clowns to the country. The problem for Kevin McCarthy is if he loses again or on a third

ballot of a fourth ballot, when does he have to look in the mirror and say, the math's not there? And the longer I hold on, the more I'm embarrassing myself, I'm embarrassing the institution, I'm embarrassing the party, and I'm embarrassing the country.

HUNT: Someone is going to have to tell him.

KING: Some grown up is going to step up at some point and say, somebody has to get to 218 or why don't you just elect Hakeem Jeffries Speaker and say we Republicans can't govern period.

(...)

3:12:51 p.m.

21 seconds

KING: And first impressions matter. This is the first impression of the Republican House. This is the first day of the second half of Joe Biden's term. This is the first day of the 2024 cycle and this is the message, not this is what we want to do for inflation, the border, immigration, this is our message about America's role in the world, this is how we're different or better than Biden and the Democrats. That's what Republicans wanted to do today. Instead, they're doing this.

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3:18:29 p.m.

47 seconds

HUNT: This has been the problem in dealing with the Freedom Caucus from, you know, John Boehner to Paul Ryan right on down to where we are today is that they do not seem to care about that piece of it. They don't care about governing. Their self-interests — you know, you've heard narcissist being used by many of their opponents in the Republican party today. You know, they care about as John has said appearing on right wing radio. What is their profile? The — the leverage and the ways that leadership used to have to get control of people like these 19 are basically gone and that means that, for them, you know, sitting here and doing this 50 times, who cares? They don't have any skin in that game necessarily whereas all these people who are sitting with Kevin McCarthy, they actually do and they may get to a point where they have to say, look, we got to make a change here.

(...)

3:20:29 p.m.

25 seconds

PHILLIP: The — the underlying problem here is that there is a huge portion of the Republican base that is not interested in any way, shape or form in anything that's happening in Washington. The whole point is to rabble rouse, to, you know, stick it to the other side, to, you know, throw out red meat and I — as long as that's the incentive structure, it's really hard if you're trying to

hand out some carrots when there's nothing you can offer them that will be good enough.