

## [Transcript] The Daily / The Ouster of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy

From New York Times, I'm Michael Bilbaro.

This is A Daily.

Today, for the first time in American history,  
the United States House of Representatives has voted to remove its leader.  
My colleague, Luke Broadwater, was there as it happened.

It's Wednesday, October 4th.

Luke, it's 5 p.m. on Tuesday night,  
and we come to you at a truly strange moment  
because the United States House of Representatives has no speaker, right?  
It is leaderless.

Yes. For the first time in American history,  
the House of Representatives has voted to essentially kick out the speaker of the House  
and leave the speakership vacant,  
meaning that as of right now,  
there is no one in charge of the United States House of Representatives.

Right. And it feels worth pausing for just a moment to reflect on the enormity of that.

I mean, this is the most important member of the legislative branch,  
the United States House Speaker,  
third in line to the presidency in the constitutional order of succession.

And suddenly, that person has been removed from office  
and the chamber itself has no speaker.

It's just harder to wrap your head around.

Yeah, it's never happened before in history for a reason  
because it is such a drastic action to take.

It means that there was such dissatisfaction in the Congress with this speaker  
that they went to this unprecedented step  
and decided they would be better off with no leader than with Kevin McCarthy in charge.

Right. So let's talk about how this happened  
because it didn't happen, as you have just hinted at,  
over an ethical breach or an accusation of a crime,  
but because of a set of policy and political differences.

So tell us the story of how this happened exactly.

And I think that means picking up where we left off with our colleague Carl Hulse on Friday  
when we last checked in on this kind of rolling drama.

And at that moment, what we were all focused on  
was what appeared to be an all but certain shutdown of the United States government.

Well, let me take you back even a little further than that.

You have to go back to January where Kevin McCarthy,  
with a very slim majority in the House,  
has to fight tooth and nail to even become speaker.

And in doing so, he had to make a number of promises to the hard right  
that already do not trust Kevin McCarthy.

And a lot of them had to do with spending.

He had to promise to keep spending levels low.

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He had to promise to pass individual appropriations bills instead of doing one big bill at the end of the year. He had to promise to give them 72 hours to review any materials. And perhaps most importantly, he had to promise to allow any single member who didn't like what Kevin McCarthy was doing to raise a motion to vacate to kick him out of the chair. Right. And so he makes all these promises. And for a while, he's doing exactly what the hard right wants. But there come a couple times where he encounters situations that he thinks will be too bad for the country. The first is when the country was on the brink of defaulting on our debt. And Kevin McCarthy cuts a deal with Democrats so that we don't default and we can keep paying the bills. Right. This was at the beginning of the summer. Yes. But in doing so, the hard right feels that he did not stand up enough for fiscal responsibility. He didn't demand deep enough budget cuts. And essentially they believe he sold them out to the Democrats and broke their trust. So that caused a deep wedge between Kevin McCarthy and these hard right Republicans. And then the second time is what we encountered this past weekend where the country was on the brink of a government shutdown. And Kevin McCarthy was forced with a very important choice. Does he cut yet one more deal with Democrats knowing he's already on very thin ice with those hard right Republicans to keep the government open? Or does he go ahead and go into a government shutdown with all the problems that causes for the country, which is what someone the hard right wants? We're in the presumption at the end of last week as this shutdown loomed. And it was a presumption I think we established pretty firmly in our last episode was that Speaker McCarthy would probably let the government shut down because he knew, as you've just said, that he has previously betrayed the trust of these far right Republicans in the House. And to do it again would truly risk inviting them to try to remove him as Speaker.

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And so this time he would probably choose his job over a fiscal crisis.

Yeah, that was a widespread assumption that many of us reporters had on the Hill.

We thought Kevin McCarthy was likely to allow the country to go into a government shutdown that the far right had such a hold over him he wouldn't defy them again.

But we were wrong.

Madam Speaker, I move that the House suspend the rules and pass.

McCarthy, to many people's surprise, cuts a deal with Democrats.

He puts a bill on the floor to keep the government open for the next month and a half.

The clerk will report the title of the bill.

HR 5860, a bill making continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2024 and for other purposes.

It does not have the deep cuts that Republicans wanted.

It does please a lot of Democrats who vote almost all of them for this bill.

On this vote, the yeas are 335.

The nays are 91.

And so many more Democrats end up voting for this bill to keep the government open than the Republicans do.

And the bill is passed.

And with that objection, the motion to reconsider is laid on the table.

You know, Kevin McCarthy makes this choice.

He said it's the right thing to do.

But for some of those hard right Republicans, he's now broken their trust a second time.

Right.

A government shutdown has been averted by what McCarthy did, but he has very much poked the bear.

Absolutely.

The hard right is furious after McCarthy takes this step.

They start grumbling about what their next move will be.

And McCarthy is well aware of this, but he's actually defiant.

We were within a few hours of government shutting down.

He comes out, he tells reporters...

There has to be an adult in the room.

If somebody wants to make a motion against me, bring it.

And he essentially says bring it on to the hard right.

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If you want to come for me and kick me out of my job  
because I did the right thing in my view,  
then let's have that fight.

Because I believe in not giving up on America.  
I'm not going to be beholden to somebody  
who portrays and does something different.

Right.

He's basically daring members of this group on the far right  
to try to oust him.

Yeah.

And one of the ring leaders of the hard right Republicans,  
Matt Gaetz of Florida,  
is all too eager to take him up on the challenge.

And you'll probably know Matt Gaetz  
from his many Fox News interviews.

He is one of Donald Trump's most loyal acolytes.

He loves the spotlight, loves cameras.

And he's been a thorn in McCarthy's side for years now.

The two of them don't like each other.

Matt Gaetz blames McCarthy for an ethics investigation  
into his conduct.

And so he is always looking for a reason  
that if he can mess with Kevin McCarthy, he's going to do it.

And what exactly does Gaetz do?

So sure enough, Monday night,  
as soon as the Congress people have flown back to D.C.  
and are entering the Capitol...

Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for one minute.

Matt Gaetz signs up to speak on the House floor.

And he carries a little binder of papers in with him.

And he hands it up on the dais and announces...

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Clause 2A1 of Rule 9,  
I rise to give notice of my intent to raise a question  
of the privileges of the House.

He will be bringing a motion to oust Kevin McCarthy  
from the speakership, and he tells reporters...

Kevin McCarthy likes to pretend  
that he makes coalition with conservatives.

But all he really does is break his word with conservatives.

He says he's not sure he has the votes to do it,  
but he thinks Kevin McCarthy has lied  
to conservative Republicans for too long.

Well, I have enough Republicans where,  
at this point next week, one of two things will happen.

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Kevin McCarthy won't be the Speaker of the House,  
or he'll be the Speaker of the House  
working at the pleasure of the Democrats.  
And I'm at peace with either results  
because the American people deserve to know who governs them.  
Essentially what he's done is started a clock  
that within the next 48 hours,  
the entire Congress will have to vote  
on whether to keep McCarthy as Speaker  
or kick him out of his job.

And so it brings up two real fundamental questions.

One, are there four Republicans  
willing to go along with Matt Gaetz?  
Has Kevin McCarthy alienated five people so deeply,  
broken their trust so badly  
that they're willing to kick out  
the leader of their own party in the House  
and essentially have no Speaker?

And then the second question is whether or not  
Kevin McCarthy has acted in a way  
that is responsible enough  
that Democrats might step in and save him.

Maybe not vote for Kevin McCarthy,  
but maybe vote present or happen to be absent that day  
where they would prefer to just keep a Speaker in place  
rather than have the House plung into chaos.

What you're really asking is,  
is there any trust left in the United States House  
of Representatives for Kevin McCarthy?

Right.

That was the question we didn't know the answer to  
on Monday night,

but we would soon find out on Tuesday.

We'll be right back.

So Luke, describe exactly what happens on Tuesday  
as McCarthy's job hangs in the balance  
and this open question looms,  
which is, will anybody save him?

Right.

Well, McCarthy makes a decision  
that he doesn't want this vote  
hanging over his head for the next 48 hours  
and that he wants to get this over with today.  
So both the Democrats and the Republicans

start at 9 a.m. Tuesday morning  
going into their respective meetings  
to sort of figure out their next step.

And Luke, what would be the best, strongest possible  
argument for Democrats to back McCarthy  
and basically save his speakership?

Well, they were talking about this all weekend  
knowing that this moment could come.

And another of Democrats made the argument  
that perhaps Kevin McCarthy is better than any  
of the alternatives that Republicans could offer up.

You know, he avoided having a government shutdown.  
He avoided defaulting on our debt.

And for better or worse,  
has kept the institution largely running  
and perhaps a farther right member of Congress  
would be even worse as speaker.

Right.

He's the devil they know  
and the one who kept the government open.

Right.

And perhaps they can extract some concessions  
out of Kevin McCarthy,  
maybe in exchange for them saving him  
they'll get co-committee chairs.

Maybe he will give more money to Ukraine.

But Kevin McCarthy calls Hakeem Jeffries  
the leader of the Democrats Monday night  
and he makes it clear that he's not willing  
to give the Democrats anything.

That the Democrats should vote for him  
because they should believe in the institution of the House  
and not want to see it in chaos.

But he's not going to go out of his way  
to make any promises to any Democrat.

He doesn't offer them anything.

And so Hakeem Jeffries walks into the 9 a.m. morning meeting  
and he puts up on the screen video of Kevin McCarthy  
on national TV bashing Democrats  
and implying in their view falsely  
that Democrats were the ones  
who wanted the government shutdown  
and this infuriates the Democrats  
in that closed-door meeting.

And what could have been a debate over the pros and cons of cutting a deal with Kevin McCarthy becomes essentially a one-sided speaking session of all of Kevin McCarthy's wrongs and ills. Even the moderate members, the ones from districts in which President Trump is popular, were saying Kevin McCarthy is untrustworthy. People are talking about how he voted to overturn the election, how he was Donald Trump's lap dog every step of the way, how he defied a subpoena from the January 6th committee. Every single person who speaks at this closed-door meeting speaks against saving Kevin McCarthy and says that the Democrats must remain united. And in their view, it will be better to have no speaker than to have Kevin McCarthy as speaker. So it's clear that he's not going to be saved by Democrats. So then the only question becomes, will these hard-right Republicans truly follow through with kicking him out of this job as speaker? Because it's one thing to say you might do it, it's another to actually do it. Absolutely. Pursuant to clause 2A2 of Rule 9, the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Gates, and the gentleman from Oklahoma, Mr. Cole, will each control 30 minutes. And this all comes to a head on the House floor during a really intense debate about the future of the House and of Kevin McCarthy's speakership. The overwhelming majority of my party supports the speaker that we elected. We're proud of the leadership he's shown, we're proud of the manner in which he's been willing to work with everybody in our conference, and I believe in this chamber. Now remember, the vast majority of Republicans in the House are in favor of Speaker McCarthy. There's only, you know, a handful who want to see him gone. There's a second group, small group. Honestly, they're willing to plunge this body into chaos and this country into uncertainty for reasons that only they really understand. I certainly don't. So for the better part of an hour, Tuesday afternoon,

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Republican after Republican,  
who supports Kevin McCarthy,  
gets up and makes the case for keeping Kevin McCarthy.  
Kevin McCarthy has earned this.  
Under Speaker McCarthy's leadership,  
our House Republican majority has actually defied all odds  
and overperformed expectations again and again and again.  
They say he's passed conservative bills.  
He has enacted tough oversight of the Biden administration.  
On January 3rd, we said the 118th Congress is about three things.  
Pass the bills that need pass,  
do the oversight work that needs to be done,  
and stop the inevitable omnibus that comes from  
the United States Senate right before the holidays.  
Kevin McCarthy has been rock solid on all three.  
They say he's kept his promises to conservatives,  
that he's put, you know, conservative people  
and conservative committees and let them do their work.  
So many Americans are better off  
because of Kevin McCarthy's leadership.  
American families, job creators, entrepreneurs,  
service members, law enforcement officer,  
and the list goes on and on.  
But that's not at all the way Matt Gaetz  
and this handful of Republicans  
who have become detractors of Kevin McCarthy view it.  
Mr. Speaker, my friend from Oklahoma says  
that my colleagues and I who don't support Kevin McCarthy  
would plunge the house and the country into chaos.  
Chaos is Speaker McCarthy.  
Chaos is somebody who we cannot trust with their word.  
I don't think voting against Kevin McCarthy is chaos.  
I think \$33 trillion in debt is chaos.  
I think that facing a \$2.2 trillion annual deficit is chaos.  
I think that not passing single-subject spending bills is chaos.  
I think the fact that we have been governed in this country  
since the mid-90s by continuing resolution and omnibus is chaos.  
They begin to say exactly how Kevin McCarthy has betrayed conservatives.  
This body is entrenched in a suboptimal path and refuses to leave it.  
Refuses to leave that path.  
We cannot change if you're unwilling to change.  
We had every opportunity to change.  
We were promised change.  
We were promised we were going to go ahead



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and we were going to get those 12 bills done.  
Do you know why you do 12 bills?  
Because it allows you to set an agenda to restore fiscal sanity.  
We chose to not do it again.  
Let's get our act together.  
Let's get on with it.  
Let's vacate the chair and let's get a better speaker.  
I yield back.  
The gentleman yields back his time.  
All time for debate has expired.  
Without objection, the previous question is ordered on the resolution.  
And then we come to the final vote.  
Right, and it's a moment of high drama in the House.  
The chair directs the clerk to conduct the vote by a call of the roll.  
Instead of a traditional vote where everyone just presses their buzzer,  
this is a roll call vote where every member will have to stand up  
after their name is called...  
Adams.  
Yes.  
Yay.  
And say how they are voting.  
Aguilar.  
Aye.  
Yay.  
And every single Democrat stands up  
and votes to oust Kevin McCarthy, a speaker.  
And everyone is counting the Republican votes.  
Most of the Republicans are voting with Kevin McCarthy.  
Biggs.  
Aye.  
Yay.  
But then one votes against him.  
Buck.  
Aye.  
Yay.  
And then another.  
Burchett.  
Yay.  
Yay.  
And sooner or later, when it gets up to six, seven, and finally eight votes  
against Kevin McCarthy from his fellow Republicans.  
On this vote, the Yays are 216.  
The Nays are 210.  
The resolution is adopted without objection.

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The motion to reconsider is laid on the table.  
The office of Speaker of the House of the United States House of Representatives is hereby declared vacant.  
Kevin McCarthy is done as the Speaker of the House.  
So, Luke, I want to talk about what this all means, both practically speaking and politically speaking.  
And I want to start with the practical side.  
What now happens in the House with it no longer having a speaker?  
What's the practical implication of that?  
And what happens next?  
Well, the short order is chaos.  
No one has ever encountered this situation before.  
There is no precedent for knowing what will happen next.  
What we do know is because Kevin McCarthy was kicked out as speaker, the next tangible step was that a temporary speaker has been put in place.  
And Representative Patrick McHenry is now the acting temporary speaker of the House.  
Patrick McHenry is a McCarthy ally.  
He's very much a placeholder.  
The first thing he did was call a recess and say, let's try to figure out what we should do.  
So, as soon as Kevin McCarthy was kicked out, the Republicans retreated with Republicans into their meeting.  
The Democrats went off with Democrats into their meeting.  
All that's consuming Capitol Hill right now is this crisis with the speakership and figuring out who possibly could be the next leader of the House of Representatives.  
So is there any type of speaker who could actually somehow navigate this dynamic and this math we've been talking about?  
Well, the hard right does have an answer to that, which is someone they can trust.  
A couple of them have said, we don't necessarily mind Kevin McCarthy's policies all that much.  
It's that we don't trust him personally.  
And so we would take someone who votes and acts like Kevin McCarthy if he just didn't mislead us and make false promises to us.  
And so while that's their point of view, the other point of view is that trying to govern those guys, those guys on the far right, is simply impossible.  
They're always going to demand more.  
They don't believe in government.  
They want everything shut down.  
The cuts they want would ruin the government and the economy.  
And what they want is unreasonable.  
And so as long as they hold sway over the House, no one can really govern it.  
Right.

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I mean, what you're hinting at is the reality that this is now an impossible job. I mean, the story of Kevin McCarthy is of someone willing to endure 15 rounds of voting and an excruciating set of side deals and promises to become speaker only to then lose the job in under 300 days.

And for anyone else thinking of running for this job, the reality is now if you upset eight of them within the Republican ranks, you're going to be ousted.

Yeah, it's a job that many people don't want.

And once they saw what happened to Kevin McCarthy, I would bet even fewer people won it.

And so that is going to be the fight that we see over the next days.

And if you are the Democrats, how are you thinking about this moment?

Well, there's an old saw in politics, and that is if your opponents are shooting each other, don't step in the middle of it.

And so I think the Democrats are happy to watch the Republicans devolve into chaos, make the case very clear to voters that that party can't govern.

They're completely dysfunctional and keep their powder dry.

And eventually maybe they have to step in and do something.

But for now, they're content to watch the Republicans flail and fail.

Luke, thinking back to the word you've used throughout this conversation, which is trust, I wonder if on some level the story of Kevin McCarthy's fall here is just as simple as you cannot run the U.S. House of Representatives if you have lost the trust of everyone.

You have to have achieved trust with one side or the other.

And in the end, he didn't.

Well, you certainly need to maintain the trust of the majority of the chamber.

And that's what Kevin McCarthy lost.

He tried to please the hard right, and then he would try to please the Democrats.

He made promises to one side and then broke those promises with separate promises to the other side.

And so by trying to be all things to all people, he ended up alienating more people than he won over.

And so at the end of the day, when a majority of the chamber, both Democrats and those hard right members don't trust you as a speaker, you no longer have a job.

Oh, Luke, thank you very much.

Thank you, Michael.

On Tuesday night, House Republicans said they would leave Washington until next week with no clear plan to pick a new speaker.

Despite speculation that he might seek to win back his job,

Kevin McCarthy said he would not stand for reelection as speaker and that he had no regrets about his approach to the job.

I don't regret standing up for choosing government over grievance.

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It is my responsibility. It is my job.

I do not regret negotiating.

Our government is designed to find compromise.

I don't regret my efforts to build coalitions and find solutions.

So I may have lost a vote today, but as I walk out of this chamber,

I feel fortunate to have served the American people.

We'll be right back.

Here's what else you need to know today.

In a Delaware courtroom on Tuesday,

President Biden's son, Hunter Biden, pleaded not guilty to three felony charges in a case stemming from a years-long federal investigation into his business dealings.

Hunter Biden has been charged with making false statements when he completed paperwork to buy a handgun.

On those forms, Hunter Biden said that he was not using illegal drugs when, according to prosecutors, he in fact was.

The case was supposed to be resolved through a plea deal

that unraveled a few weeks ago when it became clear

that Biden and federal prosecutors could not agree on its terms.

If convicted, Hunter Biden could face up to 25 years in prison and hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines.

Today's episode was produced by Rachel Quester,

Rochelle Banja, Mary Wilson and Alex Stern.

It was edited by Lisa Chow and Paige Cowett.

Contains original music by Dan Powell

and was engineered by Alyssa Moxley.

Our theme music is by Jim Runberg and Ben Landsberg of Wonderly.

Special thanks to Robert Jimison.

That's it for the Daily.

I'm Michael Balbargo.

See you tomorrow.