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House abruptly heads home early after conservatives retaliate over Johnson's government funding plan

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USA TODAY

Published 3:47 p.m. ET Nov. 15, 2023 | Updated 6:11 p.m. ET Nov. 15, 2023

WASHINGTON – House lawmakers abruptly went home a day early partially due to a familiar sight for the House Republican conference: a rebellion from the lower chamber's most conservative lawmakers.

The quick departure came just one day after passing a short-term stopgap measure to avert a government shutdown.

Some 19 Republicans, mostly comprised of members of the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus, tanked a procedural vote Wednesday morning. The procedural vote – referred to as a rule vote – has traditionally passed along party lines regardless of any member's support or opposition to the bill's rule.

House conservatives, however, have broken that precedent multiple times this year, illustrating how unwieldy the deeply divided GOP majority is for newly installed House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

Hard-right lawmakers shot down the rule vote this time around partly out of retaliation for Johnson's funding plan – referred to as a continuing resolution – that cleared the House Tuesday. Those members have clamored for past months that any funding legislation include deep spending cuts, but Johnson's bill was considered "clean" for retaining government funding at current levels.

Among their other grievances was opposition to a slate of amendments on one of the 12

appropriations bills needed to fund the government long-term.

“There’s certainly a concern with the bill itself in addition to concern relative to what happened with the (continuing resolution) yesterday,” said Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., a member of the Freedom Caucus who voted against the rule.

Chair of the Freedom Caucus, Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., contended that he and his conservative colleagues killed the rule vote out of “good faith” in pursuit of conservative policy wins.

New speaker, old divisions

Underscoring how divided the House Republican conference is even after electing a new speaker, moderate Republicans from the New York Delegation for the first time also voted to take down the rule.

Rep. Nick LaLota, R-N.Y., told reporters he voted against the rule due to spending cuts that he said would have disproportionately affected law enforcement in his district.

“We should regroup, get back to the kitchen, maybe choose some new ingredients, cook it a different way,” he said.

The House, which was originally scheduled to stay in session until Thursday, is now slated to return after Thanksgiving on Nov. 28.

The dysfunction that appears to have roiled House Republicans once again has been the norm for the conference since they took control of the lower chamber in January, but the fractures that have emerged from both conservatives and moderates threatens to make the appropriations process to fund the government long-term more arduous than it already has been.

“It’s never easy to get work done here,” said Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., chair of the Main Street Caucus, a group of pragmatic House Republicans.

“It’s a lot harder when you have people who I think are prone to emotionally immature decisions,” Dusty Johnson continued, nodding to the House’s conservative hardliners. “This is retaliation. If something doesn’t go their way, they decide they want to blow something up. I guess this is today’s fatality.”

Speaker Johnson's ascension to the speakership was paraded as a significant victory for House conservatives, who ousted his predecessor, Kevin McCarthy over his failures to meet their deeply conservative demands.

But those hard-right members' opposition to his government funding plan and their sinking of the rule vote reflects how Johnson's election as speaker changes little in the dynamics of the conference.

"Overall the functionality is gonna get a little worse before it hopefully gets better," said Rep. Garret Graves, R-La., who was one of McCarthy's closest allies. "I think that some of them are coming to realize it and I think some of it knew it the whole time."