

United States Is in a Shocking Position Politically

And all the GOP can do is stall Democratic legislation.



by Conrad Black

An extraordinary volume of unmitigated claptrap was written and uttered about the eventual elevation of Congressman Kevin McCarthy to be speaker of the House of Representatives. The Trump-haters, most of whom are indifferent or contemptuous towards Mr. McCarthy, blame the antics of the diehard McCarthy opponents on President Trump.

Then they celebrated what they took to be the fact that Mr. Trump no longer had any influence on his own followers, even

though his acolytes were a tedious awkward squad of Stone Age reactionaries who were performing the useful service of hobbling the Republican Party and reducing it to ridicule.

Came then the Never Trumpers in the guise of the equable and the open-minded, who started giving complacent advice to Mr. McCarthy after about nine or 10 ballots that he should do the gracious thing and withdraw, since this would exalt the extremists, assure at least another 50 ballots before a speaker was chosen, and succeed in not only inducing the feckless Republicans to squander their narrow victory in the mid-term congressional elections, but also to transform it into an act of political suicide.

If the Republicans were obligingly to commit suicide, even this hopeless administration and shameful, deadbeat Congress, would look comparatively presentable. Even Joe Biden, Chuck Schumer, and (the Democrats' abrasive new House leader), Hakeem Jeffries, could defeat a corpse.

The next political chorus line to mount the stage was the peppy paleoconservatives who sympathize with the diehard Republican congressional minority though they recognize that they are of insufficient numbers to win a national election, but revel in telling what a proof of the virtue and value of democracy in action the whole 15 ballot procedure was.

The office of speaker has almost always been notoriously authoritarian. A distinguished holder of that position in the 1890's, Thomas B. Reed, when he received a note from a freshman congressman asking for a copy of the rules of the House of Representatives, replied by sending back an autographed photograph of Reed himself.

The distinguished former television commentator, David Brinkley, liked to describe one of his first experiences at Capitol Hill in 1943 when the longest-serving speaker, Sam Rayburn of Texas, a 25-term congressman and Democratic Party

power-house for a whole generation, asked for unanimous consent to a substantial unspecified addition to defense spending with no discussion but the absolute promise of the president and of the speaker himself that it was a matter of such national urgency that it had to be passed at once with no possible danger of indiscretion.

One congressman only dissented and Rayburn invited him to approach the chair and after a whispered monologue of 30 seconds by Rayburn to the Congressman, the legislator returned to his place and withdrew his objection.

When Brinkley asked him what the speaker had said, he replied that Rayburn had given him the pretty clear impression that his political future would evaporate that afternoon if he did not comply. (It turned out to be the authorization of funding for the development of the atomic bomb – it was not an abuse of the president's and speaker's authority.)

There is certainly room for some democratization in the House rules, and on their face, some of the rules changes appear to be desirable. Yet the spectacle of 20 such opinionated people holding up 200 of their colleagues for this long a time and raising their demands as the controversy continued was not a very edifying one.

And it is annoying to see these intelligent conservative Republicans, not the reactionaries and rednecks, celebrate American democracy cheerfully as in the last several months it has produced for them a series of crushing defeats and disappointments.

The fact is the United States is in a shocking condition. Up to 10,000 people are entering it illegally every day, most of them unskilled and not literate in English and some of them seriously undesirable people conveying with them seven tons a year of deadly fentanyl. The urban violent crime rate is scandalous, debt levels are unsustainable, the

administration's insistence on its Green Terror is witless and destructive faddishness.

All the Republican House can do, and most Republican congressmen will be happy to do it regardless of what they think of their new speaker, is stall Democratic legislation, currently a considerable patriotic accomplishment. Obviously, nothing the Republican House of Representatives passes will even get through the Senate, let alone the White House, so any discussion of legislation coming from House Republicans is completely redundant.

The next group to be heard were the bipartisan choristers who leapt aboard the post-McCarthy election bandwagon and accused the speaker of so diluting the authority of the office that it was not the office for which he ran and that the House would be more inefficient than ever. This, of course, is nonsense, as one party or the other will have a larger majority eventually and can again modify the rules as appropriate.

The midterm elections demonstrated that the country can be spuriously frightened by the prospects of President Trump sufficiently to mitigate the voters' well-earned lack of confidence in the administration. The resulting standoff has caused a melt-down of the authority of all the federal institutions, including but not confined, to the speakership.

The Never-Trumpers who colluded with the Democrats to bring down Trump and deliver America into the palsied and sticky hands of Messrs. Biden, Schumer, McConnell, and Mrs. Pelosi will not easily elude their responsibility for this epic shambles.

That the next 18 months will continue to be a time of tedious and ill-tempered reciprocal dirty tricks, nasty rhetoric, juvenile political posturing, and widespread public disapproval of all branches of the American government and almost everybody in them, can be taken for granted. At least,

Kevin McCarthy rose to the occasion and spoke positively and addressed his opponents in both parties in conciliatory terms.

Hakeem Jeffries, in his inaugural remarks, was not having any of that and made his often harridanly predecessor, Nancy Pelosi seem like Florence Nightingale: the Democrats would always be responsible and statesmanlike and would never wallow in "Mar-a-Lago (and) Qanon," he assured us.

The optimists who think that we've just been through a happy civic episode in American democracy will need an industrial supply of sick bags as we heave our way towards the 2024 elections, which the entire civilized world must fervently hope will resurrect a credible regime in Washington at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

As Albert Camus wrote in "The Plague," it could now be said of the presidential memorials and other Washington statuary that "Only the mute effigies of famous men remind us of what man had been," (and will be again).

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