



Kevin McCarthy Withdraws From the Race for House Speaker

In a move that has sent shock waves through the Beltway establishment, outgoing GOP House Speaker John Boehner's anointed heir, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (shown), has announced his withdrawal from consideration for the post of speaker. A disappointed John Boehner has already announced postponement of the vote, while other House GOP establishment figures, such as New York's Peter King, expressed their dismay. Doubtless King, who characterized his reaction to CNN as "totally stunned," and other establishment Republicans are now worried that a less-reliable establishment asset could somehow steal the speaker's post and usher in a novel era of principled Republican leadership.



Outgoing Speaker John Boehner has been everything the GOP establishment could hope for. Like other GOP leaders in Congress, Boehner could be relied upon to play his foreordained role of caving to aggressive Democrat demands — always in the name of "civility" and "bipartisanship," naturally — whenever taxes are to be hiked, debt ceilings raised, or constitutional principles compromised. No matter how much the voters enlarged the Republican mandate — by giving the GOP the House and then enlarging their majority, or by giving them the Senate — Boehner and his establishmentarian colleagues, such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, always presented the American voters with a moving target. When the Democrats control the White House and both houses of Congress, the message was "We can't do anything without control of Congress." Now that congressional control is a *fait accompli*, the message has become, "Our hands are tied. As long as a Democrat is in the White House and we lack a veto-proof majority in the Senate, we can't pass meaningful reforms."

But for those with longer memories, the election of George W. Bush in 2000 resulted in the White House and both houses of Congress coming under Republican control, a state of affairs that persisted until the election of 2006. During those three electoral cycles, the unassailable GOP majority did nothing to rein in government spending. Rather than seek a return to limited government under the Constitution, the GOP instead created a bucketload of new Big Government programs, including the monstrous Department of Homeland Security, with its mandate to spy on every American citizen in the name of combatting terrorism, and the widely detested TSA, which has been groping, molesting, undressing, and x-raying American fliers ever since, and has begun carrying out similar activities in bus and train stations and even along heavily travelled freeways. Meanwhile, despite the warnings of a principled minority within the GOP, President Bush and his congressional cheerleaders launched the calamitous and completely unjustified invasion and occupation of Iraq, a military misadventure that has cost trillions and is largely responsible for the awful mess in the Middle East today.



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Not only that, GOP-controlled Washington gave us the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which authorized the federal government to continue to micromanage public education; the Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, the largest overhaul of the Medicare program up to that point; the Real ID Act of 2005 that required state-issued IDs such as driver's licenses to be brought into conformity with security standards defined by the new Department of Homeland Security; and the Pension Protection Act of 2006, which gave the federal government greater authority to dictate to private corporations how their pension plans should be run. These and many other pieces of pure GOP legislation continued the relentless expansion of the federal government with no regard for the constitutional legitimacy of any of the new programs this created. The U.S. Constitution does not grant the federal government any authority over public schools, healthcare, state-issued identification papers or cards, or retirement terms offered by private contracts between employers and employees.

When the Democratic Party triumphantly wrested control of both houses of Congress from the GOP in the 2006 elections, they took over management of a government that was vastly larger, more powerful, and more deeply in debt than it had been six years earlier.

Certainly Obama and the Democrats have far more enthusiasm for Big Government than most Republicans. But what is needed now is genuine opposition to, not reluctant accommodation of, the growth of Big Government.

So far, none of the candidates for speaker of the House to replace John Boehner has demonstrated principled, consistent opposition to Big Government or the Democrat ideologues that advocate it. According to *The New American's* Freedom Index, Speaker John Boehner merits an anemic 52 percent cumulative score. In other words, he supports freedom and limited government about half the time, whenever it's politically expedient. His intended replacement, Kevin McCarthy, scored better, but not by much (63 percent), while one of his main competitors for the job, Florida congressman Daniel Webster, weighs in at 62 percent. The other announced contender for the job, Utah's Jason Chaffetz, appears at first blush to be a significant improvement; his cumulative score is borderline respectable at 73 percent. However, the breakdown is much less encouraging. During Chaffetz's first term in Congress, the 111th (2009-2010), House Republicans were an embattled minority standing in the gap against newly elected President Obama and his Big Government minions. Freshman Congressman Chaffetz earned an impressive 92 percent on the Freedom Index, signaling real promise for becoming one of the House's valiant principled defenders of limited government.

As soon as Republicans retook the House in 2010, however, Chaffetz's numbers changed dramatically. For the 112th Congress, his Freedom Index score was 79 percent — still respectable, but a far cry from his congressional debut. For the 113th Congress, Chaffetz plummeted to a Boehner-esque 52 percent, and his score for the current (114th) Congress is 55 percent.

Congressman Chaffetz's numbers are symptomatic of GOP grassroots' frustration: So many newly elected GOP congressmen talk about stopping Big Government in its tracks, and fight strenuously when in the minority, but somehow set aside their convictions when it becomes their turn to be in the majority.

Much of the cognitive dissonance that afflicts Republican congressional leadership stems from a



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political trait of Republicans recently noted by Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) in a Senate speech that earned him enmity from many of his go-along-to-get-along colleagues. The Republican Party differs crucially from the Democrats, Cruz observed, in that the party leadership and big donors that support them openly despise the party base — the grassroots voters whom the GOP so lovingly courts during campaign season. But most of the money people who make the large campaign contributions, and the country-clubbers they elect, have little interest in cutting government spending, rolling back ObamaCare, protecting the lives of the unborn, heeding the Second Amendment, or any of a host of other GOP platform items.

This is in sharp contrast to the Democratic Party, whose membership, from the wealthiest echelons of the donor base to the most energetic grassroots campaigners, are all passionately committed to planks of Big Government socialism, including radical environmentalism, welfarism, hostility to laissez-faire capitalism, so-called homosexual marriage, and the unlimited “right” to abort unborn children. Where Democrats present a mostly unified front, the GOP is divided between wealthy liberals and centrists who drive the agenda, and the grassroots who actually care about such “outmoded” concerns as liberty, civic virtue, and sound economics.

Which brings us back to the reignited race for House speaker. If the GOP, or even an appreciable percentage thereof, is genuinely interested in leadership that will make a difference, they might consider changing their priorities from someone with a track record of compromise and “getting things passed” to someone with a track record of principled defense of liberty. After all, the House controls the purse strings in Washington, as the Founders intended. This, the “people’s chamber,” must sign off on all spending; if the House refuses to authorize spending for a given item, the item disappears. The millions of people who work, directly or indirectly, for the U.S. government, do not do so for free. The moment paychecks cease, offices are shuttered and work comes to a halt. “Shutting down government,” we are told, is a despicable act of political gamesmanship, yet that is what will be necessary to truly oppose the agenda of Big Government socialists such as Barack Obama. President Obama has learned that the mere threat of shutting down the government if Congress fails to do his bidding is enough to make the John Boehners, Mitch McConnells, and Kevin McCarthys scurry for cover.

Are there any alternatives? The House currently has four members who have earned a 90 percent or higher cumulative score on the Freedom Index: Raul Labrador (Idaho — 90 percent), Thomas Massie (Kentucky — 98 percent), Justin Amash (Michigan — 94 percent), and Alex Mooney (West Virginia — 90 percent), as well as a few others, such as Kansas’ Tim Huelskamp (88 percent), who are not far behind. Any of these would make a far better choice for speaker than McCarthy, Webster, or Chaffetz — if the goal is to effect real change in how the GOP conducts business.

But the goal of the party power brokers, of course, is to maintain the status quo. This is why John Boehner has postponed the election of his replacement, and is even making noises about waiting until the next Congress, when members of Congress may be more amenable to giving the establishment yet another undeserved chance to start afresh.

Photo of House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.): AP Images



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