

ON THE AMBIVALENCE OF SPEAKER MIKE'S GAVEL

Mike Johnson was reaffirmed Speaker yesterday.

The how matters. In what would have been the first vote, six people did not vote and three voted for other candidates, for a total of nine people opposing Johnson. The number is significant because the new rules require nine people to call to replace the Speaker (right wingers sent out a letter of complaints about Johnson signed by 11 members, so they have a few friends). So before the vote was cast, the right wingers demanding austerity from Johnson made a show of having the ability to immediately call to replace him.

At that point, Hakeem Jeffries had 214 votes, Johnson 210, others 3, and 6 people wandering the halls.

Then, basically, Republicans cheated to keep the vote open for two hours. They hid the "tellers," who have to tell the Acting Clerk what their vote totals, off the floor, so the vote could not be called.

Meanwhile, the six holdouts spoke to Trump, who exhorted them that Johnson was the only person with the "likability" to get his, Trump's, policies approved. Eventually, the six no votes registered for Johnson, two of the three "other" votes flipped. And Mike Johnson got the required 218 votes.

So: cheating and fealty to Trump will get Trump through to Monday where he'll be declared President.

Lots of stories on this want to determine what it all means and I think the most important takeaway is we don't know. Mike Johnson could build on cheating and blind fealty to Trump to go anywhere from here.

The hardliners made it clear – in the way they delivered their votes – they are disciplined yesterday. What's not clear are whether Main Streeters (what might be called moderates if they weren't just a different kind of right wing) could be equally disciplined if it came to it. I doubt they can. That's when you'll see the same carrots and mob-based threats we saw during the Jim Jordan fight.

Thus far, Jeffries has managed his caucus impeccably. Going forward, staying unified in opposition, in contrast to what Dems did last Congress (where they usually kept the lights on with a minority of Republicans), may be a tougher battle.

The question is how coming challenges will stress the very fragile unity Johnson won today.

Monday's vote certification should be uneventful. Kamala Harris can put herself out of a job without a terrorist attack to threaten it.

Then Congress has to raise the debt limit. This is actually an area where there could be sharp disagreement between the hardliners in Congress and Trump, because they [think they] really want to cut US debt, whereas Trump wants no limits on his spending powers. Johnson will be completely dependent on Trump, so he'll likely try to raise the debt ceiling. But there's no reason for Democrats to help him do that.

If, as I wildarse guess, Brad Weinsheimer fancies delivering up both Jack Smith and David Weiss Special Counsel reports around January 10, those reports may create chaos as well. As I've said, I think Weiss wants to smear up Biden, and Republicans could well be tempted to impeach him on his way out of dodge.

Short term Republican hopes are that they'll be able to achieve much of their policy goals through reconciliation (which cannot be filibustered in the Senate). But that's already a bone of contention.

A lot of the reviews of the vote have focused on

how little Johnson has to manage the Freedom Caucus. And many Freedom Caucus members are stupid and believe that Jim Jordan could get the gavel – and with enough coercion from Trump, they might be right.

But what we know least going forward is how tensions between Trump and those right wingers will play out, the degree to which he'll be able to coerce or con his way out of them, and the degree to which the few sane Republicans left will want to stick around and watch all that.