



OPINION: HOW CHIP ROY WON THE SPEAKER FIGHT - RICH LOWRY

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Republicans looked like they were heading for a no-win debacle on the House floor in their fight over speaker.

Instead, Kevin McCarthy got over the top, achieving a long-held ambition after a daunting feat of political endurance, and his opponents got nearly every assurance and rule change they were seeking.

Of course, some of those changes come at the expense of McCarthy's power, and the current honeymoon mood among House Republicans after the dayslong deadlock won't last.

But both McCarthy and his internal adversaries look better in light of the resolution, and among the latter, particularly Rep. Chip Roy, the third-term Texas Republican and former Ted Cruz chief of staff. His profile and influence grew during the standoff, and he'll play a key role in the contentions to come.

For many, including me, the seriousness of purpose behind the Republican revolt against McCarthy was obscured by the inability of many of the dissidents to articulate an endgame or come up with an alternative candidate for speaker. The prominent role of the likes of Matt Gaetz and Lauren Boebert, who enjoy pyrotechnics for the sake of them, was also inevitably discrediting.

Roy was the one to watch, though. He is not a nihilist, but an institutionalist with a well-considered view of how the House should work. He wants to take the leadership down a notch and allow more decentralized decision-making and fuller debate to empower the rank-and-file.

At bottom, this priority relates to his view of what it means to represent constituents.

"If you take away my ability as a member to be able to offer an amendment and to speak up and debate for it," Roy tells me, "Then I no longer am truly representing them. That means all I'm reduced to is voting 'yes,' or 'no,' up or down on some bill put together by other people's representatives."

As a passionate and sincere fiscal hawk, he also hates the shortcuts and distortions of the process that have led to rushed, must-pass "omnibus" spending bills.

As the drama unfolded on the House floor, Roy and his House Freedom Caucus allies had been lobbying for the same essential set of priorities for months. Indeed, one way to look at the speaker fight is that it was the most intense phase of an ongoing negotiation. The effort to get the GOP leadership to agree to changes began last summer, and the proponents didn't make a secret of what they were

after.

A July 2022 memo from the House Freedom Caucus outlined the thrust of the items that would eventually be adopted, and a Dec. 8 letter from Roy and a handful of others to their House colleagues forecast the final deal almost exactly, allowing one member to make a motion to vacate the speaker chair to a special committee to investigate "weaponized government."



Despite calls, meetings, and wrangling, none of this could be agreed to or nailed down with the requisite specificity as the first speaker vote on Jan. 3 approached. McCarthy's team thought it could grind down the opponents, while the dissidents knew they had to stand their ground.

"We had to basically prove for a day that we weren't going anywhere," Roy says. "We did." After the failed votes piled up, both sides sat down and worked out an agreement highly favorable to the dissenters. The fight to decentralize the rules, at least in this instance, itself vindicated what a relatively small, determined group of members can achieve.

Roy is optimistic that the conference is on the same page for what he hopes will be consequential battles over spending to come. Those will test Republican unity in -- especially when it comes to the debt ceiling -- high-pressure, high-stakes circumstances.

If the drama over the speakership over the past week is any indication, Chip Roy will be there in the midst of it all.

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