Trump-backed Republican Johnson elected speaker of US House

AFP- Republican Mike Johnson was returned as speaker of the US House of Representatives on Friday with the crucial backing of incoming president Donald Trump, ending a bitter standoff that threatened to see the 2025 session opening in chaos.

Johnson had angered backbenchers by working with Democrats to pass legislation, and his victory was secured only after tense backroom negotiations that saw more than a dozen rank-and-file Republicans voice doubts over his leadership.

A chaotic 2023-25 session was marked by conservative anger in particular over the Louisiana lawmaker's handling of spending negotiations, as fiscal hawks lined up to accuse him of being soft on the deficit.

In the end there were only three Republican holdouts as voting began – with all 215 Democrats backing their leader Hakeem Jeffries.

Congressional media outlet Punchbowl News reported that Johnson was able to keep his speakership ambitions alive after Trump intervened personally to speak to two of the rebels by phone – just before they changed their votes.

"After four years of high inflation, we have a big agenda. We have a lot to do, and we can do it in a bipartisan fashion," Johnson said as he pledged to help Trump transform the economy.

"We can fight high inflation, and we must. We'll give relief to Americans, and we'll extend the Trump tax cuts… We're going to drastically cut back the size and scope of government,

we’re going to return the power back to the people.”

With the exception of Kentucky conservative hardliner Thomas Massie, the opposition to Johnson always looked soft, and he had spent much of the week working the phones and holding meetings with the conservatives who had opposed his candidacy.

— ‘Greater than ever’ —

“Mike will be a Great Speaker, and our Country will be the beneficiary. The People of America have waited four years for Common Sense, Strength, and Leadership,” the president-elect posted on social media.

“America will be greater than ever before!”

Defeat for Johnson would have marked another embarrassment for Trump, who was shown the limits of his sway over House Republicans after they rebuffed his demands for a suspension of the country’s borrowing limit in December.

Trump’s looming presidential inauguration had also raised the stakes of the speakership fight, since the House would not have been able to certify the 78-year-old Republican’s victory, set for Monday, without electing a leader.

The speaker wields key influence in Washington by presiding over House business and is second in line to the presidency, after the vice president.

But Johnson has been weakened by the standoff with his party’s hard-liners, who demonstrated the leverage they hold given the Republicans’ wafer-thin majority in the lower house of Congress.

With the vote looking set to go down to the wire, former Democratic speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is 84 and recently suffered a fractured hip, turned up to cast her ballot, wearing flat heels for possibly the first time in her career.

House Republicans are scheduled to gather for a retreat in Washington on Saturday to talk about their plans for 2025, and the leadership meets again on Sunday in Baltimore.

But the first order of business will be to consider a controversial change to its rules package – which governs daily operations – that would allow only Republicans to force a vote on removing the speaker.

Democrats argue that the reform would leave Johnson answerable only to his own side rather than the whole chamber. In the last Congress, any single House member could introduce a "motion to vacate" the speaker's chair.

The 36-page rules package for the 119th Congress raises the threshold to nine co-sponsors from the majority party.

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