

OPINION

DANIEL BORENSTEIN

With US House speaker fight over, the real chaos begins

The unprecedented three-week Republican search for a new House speaker ended Wednesday. Now the real chaos begins.

In the end, GOP members unified behind Rep. Mike Johnson, a little-known social conservative who supports a national abortion ban, opposes federal recognition of same-sex marriages and led efforts to overturn the 2020 election results.

It should serve as a stark reminder that much of the nation doesn't share the political values of the Bay Area and most of California. That Donald Trump is now firmly in control of the Republican Party. And that any hopes that moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats could somehow unify behind a speaker and work on bipartisan solutions were fantasies.

Johnson, in his first remarks after the vote electing him speaker, promised Republicans would "serve the people of this country. We're going to restore their faith in this Congress."

But it's doubtful he means all the people. It remains to be seen whether he will work with Democrats or without them. Whether he will work with all Republicans or only those who hew to the expanding MAGA wing of the party.

Whether he plans to negotiate with President Biden, a tactic that led to the ouster of Johnson's predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, or work to block compromise.

Johnson emphasized that "the world is on fire, we stand by our ally Israel." But noticeably absent was any mention

of Ukraine, for which President Biden is seeking more funding that Johnson has opposed. That fight will be part of the upcoming budget battle as the federal government faces a shutdown Nov. 17, when the short-term deal President Biden signed at the end of September expires. The election of Johnson demonstrates how far right the House has swung. Fearful of primary challenges from the conservative wing, moderate House members, who are receding in numbers, could only stand their ground so long.

Last week, the moderates blocked the bid by Rep. Jim Jordan, a Trump loyalist and election-denier, to become speaker. But they ran out of energy to withstand the latest right-wing maneuver. So, in Johnson, they ended up with another Trump loyalist and election-denier.

It was the culmination of an amazing right-wing power play. In the narrowly divided House three weeks ago, the ultraconservatives, led by Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, leveraged just eight GOP votes and Democrats' disdain for McCarthy to oust the sitting speaker.

They then headed off two other Republican nominees for speaker, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana and Minority Whip Tom Emmer of Indiana, never bringing their candidacies to a floor vote.

The speakership battle would have gone on indefinitely unless moderate Republicans were willing to strike a deal with Democrats or acquiesce to the hard conservatives. For

most moderates, the former would have been political-primary suicide. So eventually they caved to the latter.

In the end, House Republicans landed on Johnson, who has no experience in top-tier GOP leadership. As a result, a minority of the House, a subset of the narrow Republican majority, has taken control of the lower chamber of Congress. And that Republican majority exists only because of Republican gerrymandering across the country, made possible because the GOP outmaneuvered Democrats in state legislative races.

For Californians, and especially here in the uber-liberal Bay Area, the politics of the Republican-controlled House will feel foreign. Right now, they have a backstop in the razor-thin Democratic control of the Senate and their leader in the White House.

Democrats are fortunate that, at least so far, their 80-year-old president has remained healthy. And they're lucky that the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein came from a blue state where the governor could appoint her successor.

But as long as Republicans control the House — and Trump-backed conservatives are calling the shots — the Washington standoff will continue. The no-compromise speakership fight might have been just a warmup.

Daniel Borenstein is editorial page editor for The Mercury News and East Bay Times.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LYNN RESIDENT OFFERS ENDORSEMENTS FOR ELECTION DAY

To the editor:

Election Day not being too far away, I would like to add my support for the following candidates:

Councilor-at-large:
Brian Field
Donald Castle
Roger Garcia
Nicole McClain
Ward 2:
Obad Matul
School Committee:
Lenny Pena

Lorraine Gately
Brian Castellanos
Tiffany Magnolia

Having listened to these candidates, and about them, and knowing moving forward Lynn needs very good representation, these are the individuals I'm supporting.

Please vote on Election Day.

Respectfully,
John S. Norton
Lynn

RYAN FISHER IS RUNNING FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND CHARTER COMMISSION IN SAUGUS

To the editor:

My name is Ryan Fisher. I'm a life-long Saugus resident, running for my third term on the School Committee and as a candidate for Charter Commission. My wife, Danielle, and I have a 7-year-old daughter, Ella, and a lot of cats.

Serving your town isn't about vague or empty promises. It's about track record and character. The last four years have proven that no one who is elected will know exactly the challenges they'll face. Look at the district over the last four years. We've funded all-day kindergarten, overseen the consolidation of school buildings, funded expanded access to bussing and improved curriculum, and protected after-school programs. Teachers and paraprofessionals have incredibly challenging jobs, and they are only getting harder. I'm proud to have negotiated two contracts with each bargaining unit that help retain and value qualified educators, and those who keep our schools running every day.

We still have a long way to go. I'm concerned about safety, about discipline, and with my own daughter planning to attend the MSHS complex, I want to see high achievement and challenging standards.

I'm genuinely concerned about the Charter Commission process, elected to turn Saugus into a city with an elected mayor. The charter should be impervious to politics and not be about settling day-to-day scores. Residents rejected becoming a city, so the promise changed to electing the town manager. Towns can't do that and experts say the state won't approve it. In the last week, we've all noticed a concerted effort to disparage Town Meeting, the heart of town government.

One candidate says he's open-minded to becoming a city, others focus heavily on "elect the leader" rhetoric, and one organized the process around a run for mayor. When people tell you what they'll do, elected, believe them. I was vocal in my announcement two years ago, and I'm equally vocal today, that public officials speak for the town, their words have meaning, and everyone, especially our students, are listening. I'll continue to keep that promise, and I would appreciate your vote on Nov. 7.

Thank you,
Ryan Fisher
Saugus

CHRISTOPHER TUTTLE AND ELAINE WHITE

Building on 65 years of community and inclusion at Bridgewell

In 1958, when parents and community members formed an organization called the Child Guidance Center to support youth in the Lynn Public Schools, their goal was to establish a new and different program that would allow people with disabilities to achieve their fullest potential.

At the time, it was common practice to place someone with a disability in an institution that would meet only their basic needs — away from society — for their natural lifetime. These Lynn parents and advocates wanted more for people with disabilities, knowing that if provided with opportunities and support, they could live fulfilling lives in the community.

Sixty-five years and several name changes later, that group of advocates has grown into an organization with 1,600 employees and more than 100 programs

serving 25 communities in northeastern Massachusetts. The mission for Bridgewell, however, essentially remains the same: to inspire hope and empower people experiencing life challenges to achieve their fullest potential.

Our work has also influenced the evolution of how the Massachusetts human-services profession as a whole understands and treats intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental-health challenges, and substance-use disorders; as well as how we as a society view and support the people affected by them.

At the heart of this change — inspiring and, yes, demanding growth and innovation — are the individuals we have the privilege of serving. They show us every day what is possible. As different needs have emerged, it was never a question of could they be met but how

they would be met.

Housing instability and homelessness, for example, have been a constant issue for decades. For more than 30 years, our affordable-housing program, which now manages more than 200 units — including 150 in Lynn — has provided access for very low-income individuals with disabilities to a safe, suitable home, but we continue to seek solutions to meet the demand.

Throughout our history, in being responsive to the needs of the people seeking or receiving services, we have learned many things. People with disabilities want the opportunity to work and volunteer in their communities. Many mental-health and substance-use challenges can be managed with medication, counseling, peer support, or a combination of these services.

Keeping families together helps support long-term recovery. People want to be a part of their community, and they will access services — like outpatient mental health — when they are offered locally.

So, we work every day to ensure those needs are met for the more than 7,000 people we serve each year through employment services, day programs, group residential living programs, outpatient behavioral-health clinics, and transportation services.

This mission requires innovation and responsiveness. Our various programs, for example, have grown exponentially since the 1970s, including a merger with Project COPE in 2014 and our newest program, Lotus House, a residential program for mothers in early recovery and their children, with services that aim to break

the generational cycle of addiction.

As the demand for autism programs has risen rapidly during the last two decades, we have opened two autism-specific day programs, in Billerica and Danvers, and have developed 11 residential programs for individuals on the autism spectrum.

We continue to look ahead, to gauge the coming challenges and needs, and build programs to address them, such as developing an intergenerational community for seniors and persons with disabilities. Vital to our success and longevity are the valued partnerships we have with local businesses, neighbors, supporters, colleagues, and families throughout the many communities in which we work and live. We will continue to nurture these relationships because, for all our progress

since 1958, there is still much work to be done.

We are unwavering in our fight to break down the stigma around mental health challenges, addiction and recovery, and disabilities, as everyone should be afforded dignity and the opportunity for a fulfilling life in an inclusive community. Through our first 65 years, there's something else we have learned — and it relates to our beginnings in Lynn, where the majority of our programs are located, and why we carry the attitude and the work ethic of the city: Whatever the challenge, we will figure it out and we will get it done.

Christopher Tuttle is the President and CEO of Bridgewell. Elaine White is the chief operating officer and has been working at Bridgewell for 41 of its 65 years.

The Daily Item

SERVING THE NORTH SHORE SINCE 1877

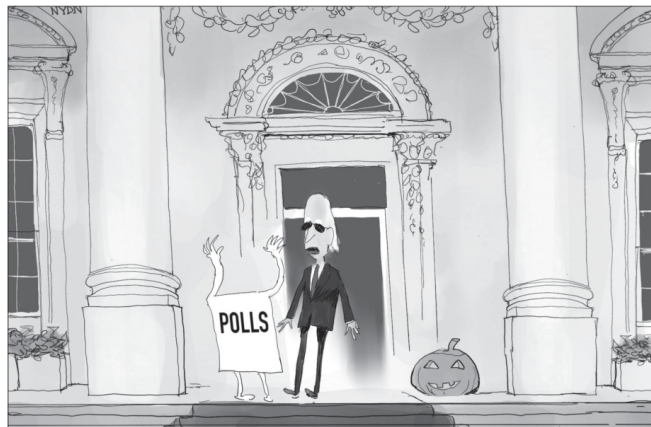
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