

Guest Column: We finally have a speaker

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The good news is that after an unprecedented 22 days without a Speaker of the House, Congress is open again. House Republicans finally resolved their internal chaos and dysfunction and selected Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana to be the new Speaker. It is shameful and inexcusable that more than three weeks of Congress' time was wasted on this intra-party drama, but at least it's over.

As we try to get Congress back to work, many of my constituents are rightfully interested in knowing more about Speaker Johnson, a little-known member of Congress who now not only leads the House of Representatives but is second in line to the Presidency. I know Speaker Johnson to be smart and affable, and I certainly hope he will be a better leader than his predecessor Kevin McCarthy. But I must also candidly share my concerns about what his sudden ascendancy to the Speakership could mean for our country.

Speaker Johnson is an avid Christian Nationalist with little experience in leading, but a long track record of MAGA extremism. For those who care about governing and democracy, and certainly anyone who values the secular character of our government, it's important to understand that the new Speaker – and the House

Republican conference that chose him as their standard-bearer – reflects the most extreme political agenda we’ve ever seen from a majority party in Congress. Speaker Johnson’s record includes:

He is among the most extreme anti-abortion crusaders in Congress.

Celebrated the end of Roe v. Wade

Supports a nationwide abortion ban, including supporting a bill that would write anti-abortion views into the Constitution

Opposed private companies covering employees’ abortion care

He is a longtime advocate for extreme homophobic, anti-LGBTQ policies.

Consistently disparages gay and trans people as having “bizarre lifestyle choices”

Authored a national version of the “Don’t Say Gay” bill

Led a Louisiana bill to prohibit state marriage benefits from going to same-sex couples and voted against the Respect for Marriage Act in the 117th Congress

Described gender affirming care for trans kids as “butchery”

Opposes comprehensive, inclusive sex education

As a state legislator, proposed legislation to protect pastors who refuse to perform same-sex or interracial marriages from anti-discrimination laws

Wrote in support of criminalizing sex between gay individuals

He supports extreme, discriminatory and inhumane anti-immigrant policies.

Supported Trump’s Muslim Ban

Voted to eliminate funding for migrant and refugee assistance

He is a climate change denier.

He is a threat to every American’s earned benefits.

Wants to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid

Voted against the PACT Act

Proposed a “debt commission” which the White House has called a “death panel” for Social Security and Medicare

He played a major role in efforts to overturn the 2020 Presidential election results.

Personally lobbied other Republicans to reject the 2020 election results

Led an amicus brief to the Supreme Court asking it to overturn the 2020 election

Voted against certifying the 2020 election, even after the riots on January 6

He voted against the continuing resolution and to shut down the government on September 30 this year.

On top of all of this, Speaker Johnson embodies one of the most serious threats to democracy of our time: an outright rejection of the separation of church and state and documented ties to extreme Christian Nationalism. His utter disdain for the establishment clause of the First Amendment and the right to actual freedom of religion reveals he's more interested bending public policy to reflect his personal religious views, which is a slippery slope to theocracy and governing under one imposed religion, instead of respecting the secular democracy our Founders envisioned.

I'm surprised and concerned that every single House Republican voted for Speaker Johnson, notwithstanding all of the above. It tells us that House Republicans are doubling down on an extreme MAGA agenda.

and unfortunately, we can expect more dysfunction and chaos ahead. My fellow Democrats and I will remain focused on the issues that impact folks across the country, including lowering costs, growing the middle class, enacting bold climate action, and protecting our democracy.