



Congressional Report

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Representative Paul Ryan: Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

House Republicans returned to Washington October 20 faced with nominating a new Speaker of the House following House Majority Leader Tim McCarthy's withdrawal from the Speaker's race.

McCarthy's surprising withdrawal from the Speaker's race, for reasons that are not entirely clear other than his comments about the Benghazi Committee, or questions about his leadership ability -- has thrown the election into chaos and allowed just about any Republican of note to toss his hat into the ring. All that changed last week.

Representative Paul Ryan Agreed to Run – With Conditions

Officially only two Republicans members were running to replace Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), Daniel Webster and Jason Chaffetz, but many were considering a run or being pushed to do so. None more so than House Ways and Means Committee Chairman, Representative Paul Ryan (R-Wisconsin).

Ryan initially said he was not interested in becoming Speaker. However, after a week of contemplation Ryan announced on October 20 that he would accept the nomination as Speaker of the House provided his Republican colleagues meet his conditions. At that point Ryan was the closest thing to a consensus candidate among his Republican colleagues. Both Chaffetz and Webster have dropped out of the contest. Ryan conditioned his acceptance to run as Speaker on the following:

- House Republicans move from an opposition party to a proposition party;
- House update rule so all can be more effective legislators;
- Unity as a conference now, not after a divisive speaker election; and
- Avoid giving up time with his family.

Ryan also wanted Republicans to alter the procedure for removing the Speaker from office. The Freedom Caucus played a major role in unseating Speaker Boehner, and Ryan wants to avoid the same fate. Ryan believes this procedure is destructive and only causes further disunity among Republicans.

Ryan has many appealing characteristics for the Republicans. He is relatively young at 45 and is considered a major source of policy ideas for the Republican Party. He is viewed as conservative but clearly not as conservative as some of the emerging groups, like the Freedom Caucus. It is the support of this conservative group, composed of many Tea Party members, that was important to Ryan's election as Speaker.

Ryan locked up support from the three major Republican caucuses: The Republican Study Group, The Tuesday Group, and the Freedom Caucus. While he did not receive a formal endorsement from the Freedom Caucus, he garnered enough support to guarantee his election. The Caucus nominated Ryan on October 28 with 45 Republicans opposing his nomination. On October 29 the full House elected Ryan the 54th Speaker of the House by a vote of 236. Nine members voted against Ryan and for their candidate, Representative Daniel Webster. Seven of the nine members belong to the House Freedom Caucus.

In his acceptance speech Ryan said it was time to fix the “broken” House and begin solving the country's problems rather than add to them. He called for an end to the partisan gridlock which has paralyzed Congress in recent years. In seeking to end the divisions with the Republican Party, Ryan also promised to give Committee Chairmen and rank and file members more power to craft legislation that comes before the House. This has been a key

demand of the Freedom Caucus. In another nod to the Caucus, Ryan promised a return to “regular order” under which bills will come to the House Floor only after the relevant committee had held hearings and approved the bill for action by the full House.

Whether the Freedom Caucus will give Ryan room to maneuver as Speaker remains to be seen. Although a small Caucus of 40 members they are loud and influential. Ryan is likely to have his work cut out for him in managing this group.

Ryan’s Middle East Policy

Ryan reflects the House Leadership’s support for Israel and as such is a reliable vote for legislation related to Israeli security. His official website states:

“America has no better friend in the Middle East than the nation of Israel. “Not only is Israel the region’s only fully functioning democracy, with a government based on popular consent and the rule of law, but it is also a valuable ally against Islamic extremism and terrorism. Our shared democratic values and national interests are supported by maintaining a close friendship with Israel. Americans also have a strong interest in Israel achieving a lasting peace with its neighbors – including the Palestinians.

Reasonable people – including those who live in the Middle East – differ about how the conflict between Israel and Palestine can be resolved. However, I believe at least one thing is clear: we cannot advocate for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that jeopardizes Israel’s safety or legitimizes terrorism. Hamas, which is one of the two major Palestinian political factions, is an Islamist terrorist group whose charter calls for Israel’s destruction, refuses to recognize Israel’s existence, and calls Osama Bin Laden a ‘martyr.’

While I do not have a role in the diplomatic discussions over the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, America should not pressure Israel to agree to a peace deal that is unlikely to result in peace and security. Real peace will require Palestinians to recognize that Israel has a right to exist, even as it will require two states for the two peoples. Introduced by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor on May 13, 2011, H. Res. 268 reaffirms the United States' commitment to a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through direct negotiations. I co-sponsored this legislation, and it passed the House on July 7, 2011 by a vote of 407-13. I was also a cosponsor of H.R. 4133, the United States-Israel Enhanced Security Cooperation Act, also introduced by Majority Leader Eric Cantor, which passed the House on May 9, 2012 by a vote of 411-2. H.R. 4133 states that it is United States policy to reaffirm the commitment to Israel's security as a state, provide Israel with the military capabilities to defend itself, expand military and civilian cooperation, assist in a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and encourage Israel's neighbors to recognize its right to exist.”

Ryan has denounced Hamas in no uncertain terms, calling it “an Islamist terrorist group whose charter calls for Israel’s destruction,” and proclaims that the US “cannot advocate for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that jeopardizes Israel’s safety or legitimizes terrorism.” Ryan, however, has endorsed a two-state solution, which these days is widely perceived as unattainable.

Nevertheless, Ryan cosponsored legislation in 2011 that passed the House, opposing the “unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state” and warned that American aid would be withdrawn if the Palestinians were to go ahead and pursue statehood in a one-sided fashion. He also supported the Palestinian Accountability Act (H.R. 2457) in 2011 which prohibited “the use of the word ‘Palestine’ in US government documents” and imposed restrictions on aid to the Palestinian Authority.

In January 2009, during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, Ryan stood by the Netanyahu government and co-sponsored a bill “recognizing Israel’s right to defend itself against attacks from Gaza and reaffirming the United States’ strong support for Israel.” The resolution also laid the blame for the violence squarely at Hamas’ doorstep and insisted that its terrorist infrastructure be dismantled.

On the issue of Iran and its pursuit of nuclear weapons, Ryan has consistently promoted bills imposing tougher sanctions on the Ayatollahs and calling on them to desist from their “devious aims”. He cosponsored the recent non-binding House resolution disapproving the Iran nuclear deal.

It is expected that Ryan will unify House Republicans. As Speaker, he will influence policy, set the House’s agenda and make deals with the Senate and White House. But, if the House conservatives have their way, Ryan may have less influence in these areas than his predecessor. Ryan will be walking a political tightrope as he tries to move legislation, and appease the conservative Republicans who will be carefully watching to ensure Ryan does not stray too far from the Conservative path.