

Now Speaker, Ryan Hopes to Fix 'Broken' House

Newly elected U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan on Thursday promised to sweep away Republican Party differences and repair a "broken" House of Representatives by returning legislative power to committees and rank-and-file members.

Ryan won 236 votes among the chamber's 247 Republicans to be elected speaker, abandoned by only a handful of conservatives who mounted repeated revolts that pushed out his predecessor, John Boehner, who retired.

Ryan said in a speech after the vote that infighting in the Republican-majority House had been counterproductive and added to the legislative gridlock in Washington.

"We're not solving problems, we're adding to them and I am not interested in laying blame," Ryan said.

"We are not settling scores, we are wiping the slate clean," Ryan added to applause.

Ryan said the House would tackle tough issues, including reducing budget deficits and reforming taxes, saying this would help raise incomes and bring people out of poverty.

The Wisconsin congressman said he would return control over drafting legislation to committees and rank-and-file members, adding: "If you know the issue you should write the bill."

A constant source of friction among conservatives had been Boehner's practice of drafting major spending legislation in secret, often in negotiations with Democrats as fiscal deadlines loomed.

Ryan's main Republican challenger, Representative Daniel Webster of Florida, received nine votes from members of the

right-wing Freedom Caucus and other conservatives who frequently battled with Boehner by pressing for quicker progress in shrinking government.

But most Freedom Caucus members, including chairman Jim Jordan, voted for Ryan. One vote each went to former Secretary of State Colin Powell, Representative Jim Cooper of Tennessee, and Representative John Lewis of Georgia.

Ryan now moves to the number two succession spot for the presidency behind the vice president, a position he sought in the 2012 election as Mitt Romney's running mate.

Previously the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Ryan has served in Congress since 1999. He is the architect of conservative budget plans that sought to slash social safety net programs, including effectively privatizing Medicare health benefits for seniors, while cutting tax rates for the wealthy and boosting military spending.

As the 54th speaker, Ryan's first challenge will be to avoid a government shutdown on Dec. 11 when funds for an array of federal agencies expire.

Boehner, in an emotional farewell speech before the vote, said: "I leave with no regrets or burdens." In what could be a warning to hard-liners, Boehner advised: "Real change takes time ... So believe in the long, slow struggle." {eo}

(Additional reporting by Richard Cowan; Editing by Susan Heavey and Grant McCool)

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