

What Does It Matter Who the House Speaker Is?

House Speaker John Boehner announced last week he would be resigning from Congress, effective Oct. 30, and Republicans have already begun competing for the top leadership posts in the wake of his news.

House Republican leadership consists of four positions—speaker, majority leader, majority whip and conference chair—and current House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California continues to gain support from colleagues in his appeal to replace Boehner as the top House Republican.

Shifts among the leadership ranks depend primarily upon McCarthy's bid for the speaker—if the California Republican moves up to assume the top Republican position, it creates an opening for majority leader and potentially majority whip, depending on whether Republicans elect Scalise to serve as their new majority leader.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, the current chair of the Republican conference, was rumored to be considering a bid for majority leader, and her win would've created an opening for her position. However, the No. 4 Republican dropped out of the running Monday night.

But what do each of the leadership positions do, and how are House GOP leaders elected?

Speaker of the House

The Candidates: Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, Rep. Daniel Webster of Florida

How the Position Is Elected: To elect a speaker of the House,

each party in Congress first nominates a candidate in a closed-door meeting, according to a 2014 report from the Congressional Research Service. The House then convenes at the beginning of the new Congress, and each party officially nominates their respective candidates. To assume the speakership, a candidate must receive 218 votes, and the speaker—typically the nominee from the majority party—has historically been elected along a party-line vote.

In January's speaker election, 25 Republicans voted against Boehner, the biggest defection from an incumbent in the last century.

What the Speaker Does: In addition to presiding over the House, the speaker administers the oath of office to new members, signs bills and resolutions passed by the House, and appoints members to committees. The speaker also recognizes members to speak or make motions and declares quorums.

Conservative lawmakers are focused primarily on the race for House speaker, a staffer for a conservative member told *The Daily Signal*, as the top Republican sets the tone for the remainder of leadership and dictates what action the House will take, regardless of the role the majority leader plays in planning the agenda. The staffer said conservatives are looking for a member who can “lead, set the priorities, have an open debate and maintain regular order.”

“When (Republicans) find someone who can do that, it will trickle down into the other positions as well,” the staffer said. “The speakership is the key position to concentrate on, and it kind of dictates what the other ones do.”

Majority Leader

The Candidates: Rep. Tom Price of Georgia, Majority Whip Steve Scalise of Louisiana

How the Position Is Elected: In a closed-door meeting held

before the start of the new Congress, a majority leader is elected by members of the majority conference in a secret ballot.

What the Majority Leader Does: The majority leader, second in command to the speaker of the House, oversees the daily legislative operations. According to a report from the Congress Research Service, the majority leader schedules legislation to go to the floor and plans the legislative agenda.

Majority Whip

The Candidates: Chief Deputy Whip Patrick McHenry of North Carolina, Rep. Peter Roskam of Illinois, Rep. Dennis Ross of Florida, Rep. Pete Sessions of Texas

How the Position Is Elected: Like the selection of a majority leader, the majority whip is elected in a closed-door meeting of the conference and by secret ballot.

What the Majority Whip Does: The majority whip is responsible for “marshalling support” for their party’s position on issues and legislation, according to the the Congressional Research Service. With a group of GOP lawmakers who serve on the “whip team,” the majority whip counts votes on legislation and works to persuade members to vote in line with the party.

Conference Chair

The Candidates (if McMorris Rodgers decides to step down): Rep. Lynn Jenkins of Kansas and Rep. Luke Messer of Indiana

How the Position Is Elected: According to the Congressional Research Service, the heads of each respective conference are elected in the same manner as the majority leader and majority whip: in a closed-door meeting and through a secret ballot.

What the Conference Chair Does: The conference chair presides

over party meetings and promotes the decisions and ideas agreed upon by the conference. {eoa}

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