

US House has no members, no rules as speaker race drags on

By MARY CLARE JALONICK an hour ago





WASHINGTON (AP) — As [Republicans continue to squabble](#) over who will be the next speaker, there are essentially no members in the U.S. House of Representatives — only members-elect.

Without a speaker, none of the them can be sworn in, and the 118th Congress can't convene or vote on any rules. Parliamentary procedure has been jettisoned in favor of controlled chaos. Members of both parties are unsure whether they can call votes or make motions on the floor because there is no speaker to rule on their requests. Committees can't be formed and legislation can't be passed.

"I don't know what my status is," said Democrat Ted Lieu of California. "I don't know if I have health care, I don't know if my staff get paid. We're looking at all of that now because this hasn't happened for 100 years."

Former Rep. Billy Long of Missouri, who just retired, has been tweeting about what he calls "Bizaroland." At one point he openly wondered in his Twitter bio whether he was still a congressman (he isn't).

The rule-less, member-less House may only be a blip in history if Republicans are able to find a way forward this week and elect a new speaker. While that remains a strong possibility, a resolution to the standoff seemed distant on Wednesday, as Republican Kevin McCarthy of California lost a second day of roll call votes on the floor. [Supporters and opponents all appeared dug in.](#)

POLITICS

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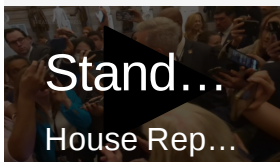
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The uncertainty added to the surreal, looser-than usual atmosphere on the House floor Wednesday as members sat in their seats for vote after vote, hour after hour, negotiating, gossiping and wondering what comes next. Some relaxed with books or newspapers, or scrolled their phones. Some took photos and selfies, a practice that is usually forbidden by the rules.

Others still had children with them in the chamber, a holdover from Tuesday's proceedings when family often accompany members to watch them be sworn in. Only they weren't sworn in on the first day of the new Congress -- the first time that had happened in a century.

In 1923, the process of selecting a speaker lasted for three days. In 1855, it dragged on for two months, with 133 ballots.



"It's a very strange limbo," said Democrat Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania, who had hoped her visiting grandchildren would get to see her sworn in on Tuesday. "We are operating by precedent."

On the House floor, clerk Cheryl Johnson is holding the gavel, not the Republican majority.

"Madam speaker," Republican Chip Roy of Texas said at one point, addressing the rostrum as members usually do, before correcting himself. "Madam clerk," he amended.

Off the floor, members are operating under the rules for the last Congress — they think. No one really seems to know, and there are concerns about what would happen if the stalemate were to last until mid-January, when paychecks are expected. Some staff are in limbo — only provisionally employed if they are new hires or switching jobs.

Republican Tom Cole of Oklahoma, the incoming chairman of the House Rules Committee, said that members-elect were operating under the rules of the previous Congress, when Democrats were in control. But he added: "I don't know if that's written down."

Without a speaker, "there's a lot we can't do," Cole said. Staff and members will be paid, he said, "but at some point it shuts off."

As the hours ticked by, members started to ponder what-if scenarios. Lieu said he worried that lawmakers aren't able to look at classified documents important to national security, and

wouldn't be able to respond to a world crisis. Could websites be updated? Would emails continue to work?

“Who can legally help any and all of our citizens with issues we normally handle everyday?” tweeted Long, the former Missouri congressman. “Passports, IRS, #Veteran’s issues, SBA, Post Office, Immigration issues, Corps of Engineers, etc. who’s getting paid?”

“This brings up a ton of legitimate questions,” wrote Long.