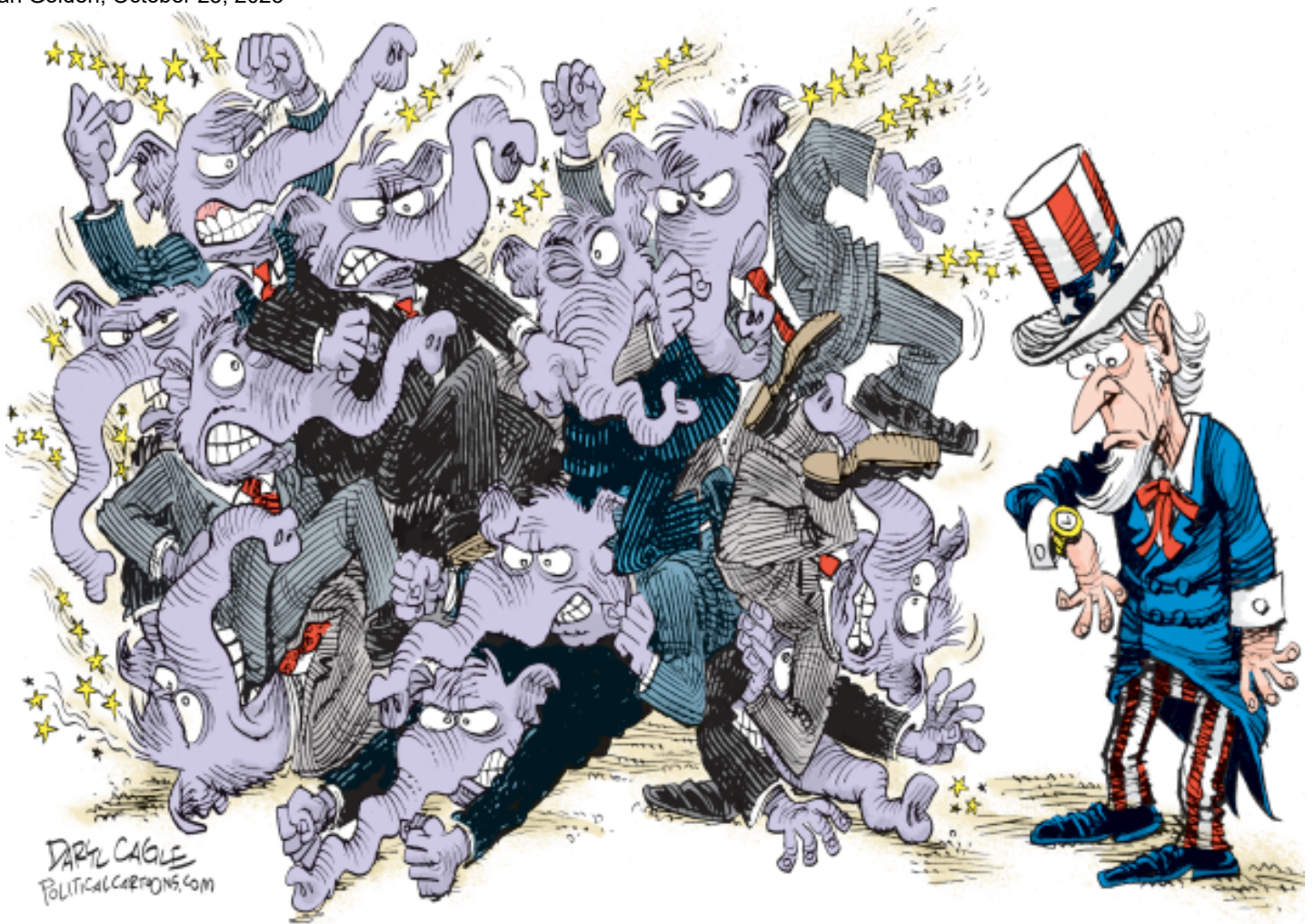


SPEAKER FIASCO AN EMBARRASSMENT FOR REPUBLICANS

Carl Golden, October 25, 2023



As the Republican effort to select a Speaker of the House stumbles and staggers ineffectually into its third week, it has deteriorated from drama into farce.

Embarrassing is no longer an adequate descriptive for the events since Oct. 4, when California Congressman Kevin McCarthy was deposed by a small band of ideological misfits, throwing the House into a paralyzing never-never land at a time when the Mideast is in flames and the Federal government is less than a month away from running out of money to function.

Embarrassment has been replaced by disgrace and – if failure to resolve the impasse continues – the Republican House majority will forfeit its right to lead.

Not surprisingly, tempers have frayed, leading to nasty exchanges which further divide the Republican caucus and raise the very real possibility that a new Speaker will be hopelessly hamstrung in efforts to overcome the bitter aftermath and reconcile the warring factions.

Holding the majority in the House – even by the slender four-seat margin currently enjoyed by Republicans – is the ultimate partisan political goal, offering a position of power, a seat at the table and a voice of influence in establishing public policy priorities.

The existing thin margin of error normally would be sufficient incentive to achieve unanimity, to create a camaraderie with an “us versus them” flavor and an acute understanding that internecine warfare will undercut solidarity of purpose and destroy the ability to control and influence outcomes.

By engineering the first in history ouster of a sitting Speaker, the malcontents – led by terminally self-absorbed Florida Congressman Matt Gaetz – tossed all of that aside, setting a dangerous precedent they will repeat if they disagree with a newly installed Speaker.

They seem to embrace chaos, turning a blind eye and closed mind to the destructive impact of their action on government affairs and incalculable damage inflicted on the reputation and image of the Republican Party.

They have displayed a lack of a coherent philosophy of governance, aside from a latent desire to burn it down and replace it with an as yet undefined system.

Gaetz justified the revolt against McCarthy as retribution for the Speaker’s dealing with Democrats and accepting their help in approving a short term spending package to avert a government shutdown. He convinced the handful of his like-minded colleagues that McCarthy had committed an unpardonable sin and deserved removal as his punishment.

Others were less charitable, suggesting Gaetz was more motivated by his desire to exact payback for what he felt was the Speaker’s refusal to intercede on Gaetz’ behalf with a House Ethics Committee investigation of the Florida Congressman.

With no apparent fallback position and the lack of any plan to move forward should the removal of McCarthy succeed, Gaetz set the stage for the moderate, centrist wing of the party to react by rejecting both Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana and Judiciary Committee chair Jim Jordan of Ohio in their attempts to win the Speaker’s position. Most recently, Majority Whip Tom Emmer’s candidacy collapsed before they could even take a floor vote.

The inevitable result has been an ongoing drama played out in public of a party unable to handle and effectively manage its majority status and, hence, incapable of governing.

It has led as well to quiet conversations concerning a coalition government, an alliance between a majority of Republicans and Democrats in an unprecedented power sharing arrangement, including the selection of a Speaker.

It would constitute a humiliating admission by House Republicans that their party is irreparably broken, but their desire to restore a working, functioning Congress to deal with the nation’s most pressing problems overrides political considerations and reputational damage.

As unlikely as it is, such a power sharing coalition would isolate Gaetz and his cohorts, stripping them of any leverage and consigning them to irrelevancy.

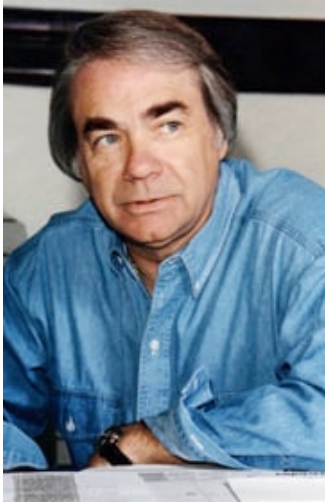
For the Republican Party, though, the damage has been done and the stain indelible. Republicans who once pridefully boasted they were the party of Lincoln, Eisenhower and Reagan now worry it’s become the party of Moe, Larry and Curley.

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