

# McCarthy abruptly withdraws candidacy for House speaker

BY ERICA WERNER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Confronting insurmountable obstacles, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy suddenly withdrew from the contest for speaker of the U.S. House on Thursday, shocking colleagues just before they were to vote and producing ever-deeper chaos for a divided Congress.

"We need a new face," McCarthy declared after a closed-door meeting where House Republicans were prepared to nominate him as speaker but instead listened in disbelief as he took himself out of the running. "If we are going to be strong, we've got to be 100 percent united."

Allies said that even though he would certainly have emerged the winner from Thursday's secret-ballot election of Republicans, McCarthy had concluded he did not have a path to getting the needed 218-vote majority in the full House later this month.

A small but determined bloc of conservatives had announced they were opposing him, and they commanded enough votes to block him on the floor.

These same lawmakers, members of the hardline House Freedom Caucus, pushed outgoing Speaker John Boehner to announce his resignation just two weeks ago by threatening a floor vote on his speakership. Some of them cheered the announcement by Boehner's No. 2.

"The establishment has lost two speakers in two weeks. K Street must be shaking in their boots. Mitch McConnell must be shaking in his boots, too," said Rep. Tim Huelskamp of Kansas, naming the Republican majority leader of the Senate.

One immediate impact, however, might be to prolong Boehner's tenure. The Ohio Republican, who had intended to leave Oct. 30, said he would stay on "until the House votes to elect a new speaker."



House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Calif. speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington Thursday after dropping out of the race to replace House Speaker John Boehner, who is stepping down and retiring from Congress at the end of the month.

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— Rep. Tim Huelskamp, Republican, Kansas

The man most widely seen as a potential speaker in McCarthy's place immediately ruled it out.

"While I am grateful for the encouragement I've received, I will not be a candidate," said Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the former vice presidential nominee who now chairs the Ways and Means Committee. But Ryan was under intense pressure to reconsider, including from Boehner and McCarthy himself.

"I would hope he would run," McCarthy said of Ryan.

Establishment-minded Republicans expressed bitter frustration at the sway of the Freedom Caucus at a time when Republicans command their largest House majority in 80 years.

And stark uncertainty lies ahead as lawmakers question how any candidate backed by mainstream Republicans will be able to prevail in the House.

It all comes with Congress in desperate need of steady leadership as major fiscal and budgetary deadlines loom, starting with the need to raise the government's debt limit to avoid a market-shattering default in a month's time.

"This is unprecedented to have a small group, a tiny minority, hijack the party and blackmail the House," said Rep. Peter King of New York.

McCarthy might have been able to eke out a win, but he said that's not how he wanted to become speaker. It's now unknown when the House GOP election will occur, and in doubt as to whether a scheduled Oct. 29 floor vote by both Democrats and Republicans will go forward.

McCarthy's two announced GOP rivals for speaker — Reps. Jason Chaffetz of Utah and Daniel Webster of Florida — lack widespread support in the House GOP, although

Webster has the backing of the Freedom Caucus, whose members dismissed McCarthy as a clone of Boehner.

Numerous other names began to surface of possible candidates, and lawmakers were openly discussing the possibility of elevating a "caretaker" speaker to serve for a short time.

"You understand it could be a quick end to your political career," remarked Rep. Lynn Westmoreland, R-Ga., one of those discussed. He held up his cellphone to show calls coming in from McCarthy.

The Republicans' noon-time meeting was adjourned moments after it began with McCarthy making his jaw-dropping announcement as his wife and kids looked on.

"Disbelief, from the surprise announcement by Boehner to the quick nature of this election to it now being postponed — it's uncertainty on top of uncertainty," said freshman Rep. Ryan Costello of Pennsylvania. "I've been here nine months, I've never seen anything like this. I'd bet you most other members who have been here 20 or 30 years would say the same thing."

# EU agrees to speed migrant deportation, buttress borders

LUXEMBOURG (AP) — The European Union on Thursday took measures to buttress its porous external borders and toughen up its migrant return program in an attempt to build a credible refugee policy that would continue to embrace those fleeing for their lives yet punish those seeking economic gain.

Facing their toughest refugee emergency since World War II, the 28 EU nations committed to speed up and intensify the deportation of people who do not qualify for asylum, including more special flights out and detention for those who might slip into illegal residence.

It all was to underscore one key message: Europe feels overwhelmed and needs to be far more rigorous in sending economic migrants back if it wants to find enough goodwill among its population to continue harboring true refugees.

"Increased return rates should act as a deterrent to irregular migration," the conclusions of the meeting said.

More than 500,000 people have arrived this year seeking sanctuary or jobs. But of the people who fail to obtain asylum or residency in the 28-nation EU, less than 40 percent actually go back, and all agree that should change quickly.

"We need to see Europe upping its game," Britain's interior minister, Theresa May, said.

"If there is no return policy there is no basis for the refugee policy," said French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, adding agreements should be quickly made with many of the developing nations from where tens of thousands of economic migrants leave in

desperation for a better life in Europe.

At the same time, he put to the EU nations a far-reaching plan to beef up the external borders by committing member states to contribute more personnel to the EU's border agency and eventually set up a largely autonomous international "corps" that could intervene wherever a crisis appears.

French officials said that in the short term, member states would be obliged to contribute more personnel to the Frontex border agency based on their population, wealth and other criteria.

Last week, Frontex appealed for 775 additional staff to deal with the migrant crisis in Greece and Italy. It would roughly double the staff the agency has there now, mainly on some 30 vessels in the Mediterranean.

In the long term, France proposes a multinational European border guard corps which would have much more autonomy to act and contain crises.

To further deal with the mass movement of migrants through the Balkans, EU ministers discussed better cooperation with their counterparts from the region and the nations bordering Syria, from where many refugees have fled the war.

Several ministers lauded a better understanding at the meeting between Balkan nations, which have often fought over who should take charge of the refugees transiting through their countries.

"That is much more efficient than throwing the problems at one another," said Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders. "It is a complex humanitarian crisis demanding concrete cooperation."

# U.S. airman who thwarted French train attack stabbed in brawl

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Airman 1st Class Spencer Stone, celebrated as a hero for helping to stop a terror attack on a French train over the summer, was stabbed and seriously wounded outside a bar in his hometown early Thursday in what police said was an alcohol-related brawl.

Stone, 23, was knifed three times in the upper body but was expected to survive after about two hours of surgery, said Dr. J. Douglas Kirk, chief medical officer at UC Davis Medical Center.

"This incident is not related to terrorism in any way," Deputy Police Chief Ken Bernard said. "We know it's not related to what occurred in France."

A grainy surveillance video from a camera outside a liquor store showed a man who appeared to be Stone fighting with several people at an intersection. The group spilled into the street as people took swings at each other, and one person got knocked down.

Police said two assailants fled in a car. No immediate arrests were made.

Bernard said Stone was out with four friends when they got into a fight with another group of people. The deputy chief would not say what sparked the argument. He said there was no evidence the assailants knew who Stone was.

Bernard said he did not know whether Stone was drinking, but others were.

Kirk said Stone remained heavily sedated in the hospital's intensive care unit. He declined to discuss any details about the surgery or whether any vital organs were damaged in the stabbing, beyond saying Stone had "significant injuries."

The airman arrived at the nearby hospital conscious despite his wounds, the doctor said.



This frame from video provided by A&P Liquors, shows a group of people, including U.S. airman Spencer Stone, fighting outside a bar in Sacramento, Calif.

"I suspect given his history of recent events he is quite a fighter," Kirk said.

He said Stone's family asked him to convey "their deepest gratitude for all the expressions of concern for his welfare at this very difficult time for them."

In August, Stone and two of his childhood friends from Sacramento, National Guardsman Alek Skarlatos and college student Anthony Sadler, were vacationing in Europe when they sprang into action aboard a Paris-bound passenger train and tackled Ayoub El-Khazzani, a man with ties to radical Islam. He had boarded the train with a Kalashnikov

rifle, a pistol and a box cutter. Stone, who is assigned to Travis Air Force Base in California, suffered a severely cut thumb and a knife wound to his neck during the struggle with the gunman.

President Barack Obama met with the three Americans last month, praising them for their quick thinking and courage and calling them "the very best of America." They were also awarded France's highest honor by President Francois Hollande. The three appeared on late-night talk shows and received a parade in their hometown.

The stabbing happened in a busy area of central Sacramento ringed with bars.

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