

Missing the Point – Politically speaking, “What ye sow, so ye shall reap.”

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Ex-Speaker of the House, Kevin McCarthy's mindless arrogance was his downfall. (Shutterstock)

I usually do my best to avoid writing these op/eds about the hot topic du jour. The thing is, yesterday's events in the House of Representatives were so momentous, so impressive that I can't help myself. Here goes...

As you undoubtedly know by now, a relative handful of Republicans, led by Congressman Matt Gaetz, voted with the entire Democrat caucus to throw Speaker Kevin McCarthy to the curb after only nine months in office.

McCarthy, whose picture you see at the top of this piece, was an awful Speaker. All evidence to the contrary, he claims to understand politics and insists that his focus has always been on doing what's best for the American people. The latter point is ludicrous. All he's ever done is what's best for Kevin. And now, thank goodness, he's not only out of power in the House, he can no longer dream of becoming President one day. Instead, he has been relegated, of his own doing, to being little more than a shameful footnote in the political history of these times.

Yesterday was most decidedly *not* about Kevin McCarthy – except for his being the poster boy for most of the Republican party who, even as I write this, are still missing the point. Why do so many of them find it so hard to read the writing on the wall?

For one thing, Kevin claims to understand politics, but he doesn't. Clueless is more like it. For Kevin McCarthy, politics means telling whoever is listening what they want to hear. That's not politics. It's certainly not leadership. No. It's nothing more than the behavior of an intellectually challenged official who will say and do whatever it

takes to obtain and stay in power. It's not about love of country, or even party or any particular political creed. Worst of all, it's behavior that discourages trust. Whatever your politics, effective deal making requires that the parties to the agreement are able to trust each other to honor their commitments. Otherwise, what's the point?

Immediately after January 6, Kevin stood on the floor of the House and derided President Trump for his role in the attack on the Capitol – and then he went to Florida to pledge his allegiance to the very same Insurrectionist-in-Chief. What changed his mind? Nothing substantive, that's for sure. Different day, different audience, different position. It helps to be driven by the moral code equivalent of Silly Putty.

Later, on the fifteenth vote to elect a new Speaker, Kevin made a deal with the last radical Republican holdout to allow a single Republican to initiate a vote to vacate the office to which he aspired. Wow. That might have made sense were there a large Republican majority in the house, but there wasn't. That last holdout was Matt Gaetz. That's his official photograph from [Gaetz.house.gov](https://gaetz.house.gov). Just 41 years old, he's somewhat John Kennedy-esque, isn't he? Gaetz may be only a mediocre attorney turned Florida Congressman, but he understands basic political math.



If you only have a four vote majority in the house and the minority caucus is voting as a rock solid block, all you need is three Republicans voting with the Democrats to “vacate,” as they like to call it, the current Speaker. It was an idiotic, desperate deal for Kevin McCarthy to make. His tenure as Speaker was doomed from the start.

What's worse, is the fact that the vast majority of House Republicans are railing at Gaetz and his cohorts as disruptors, masters of chaos with personal agendas, who couldn't care less about political process and country. Their problem is that Gaetz is not the bad guy here.

Mind you, I'm no fan of Matt Gaetz – who, not incidentally, is a tremendous speaker. His opposition to our support for Ukraine is unforgivable, but some of the points he argues so effectively are true and important. Forget for the moment his relationships, whatever they really are, with Trump and his hard core groupies in the House, most of whom wanted McCarthy to stay in office. Put all that aside and listen to what he has to say from the point of view of academically pure conservatism.

Gaetz is all about our national debt and deficit spending – tens of *trillions* of dollars we're never going to pay off and which pose a very real existential threat to our

economy, government and standing in the world hierarchy. That debt and deficit spending – and other major problems he’s shouting about – are not his imagination nor are they political hyperbole.

His message is remarkably simple and compelling. Republicans in Congress – and Congress in general – have been ineffectual for decades, particularly recently under McCarthy’s Speakership. Enough is enough, he’s telling us. It’s a point that has merit and that Gaetz is very effective at making. Matt Gaetz is frustrated by continuing resolutions and omnibus legislation. Who isn’t? But then he’s actually done something about it and deserves credit where credit is due.

Donald Trump is, let’s be honest, as dumb as he is nuts, but something about his blabbering and style have struck a responsive chord. Gaetz, on the other hand, is a natural. Much younger, better looking and surprisingly well-spoken, Matt Gaetz is making sense. Not “sense” in that independent Democrats like me agree with everything he says. Not even close. But “sense” in that the major points he makes are, for want of a more lengthy explanation, correct.

Matt Gaetz and company are not disruptors per se, although disrupting is precisely what they’re doing. Who are McCarthy’s Republican conference supporters kidding? Gaetz and company are not the problem. It’s McCarthy and his supporters that are what’s wrong with Republicans in the House, by virtue of their complacency and inaction – and inexplicable and inexcusable preoccupation with Donald Trump.

Makes me shudder to say it but, when you think about it, it’s Gaetz and his group of radicals that come out of this mess looking like heroes. At least inside the Republican conference, they’re the ones making sense. Their actions may end up costing the Republicans control of the House, thank goodness, but their dissenters’ vision of a new Republican Party – the chaos most Republicans in the House are so appalled by and worried about – may be just the slap in the face the Republican Party needs to get itself back on track.

-Les Cohen

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