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Within the U.S. political system, how does the Speaker of the lower house of Congress influence decisions? How extensive is the hold of California Congressman Kevin McCarthy, the newly-elected Speaker? Will values of 'Trumpism' play a part in Mr. McCarthy's role in holding the House?

January 08, 2023 10:45 pm | Updated 11:50 pm IST

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Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy bangs the Speaker's gavel for the first time after being elected the next Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The story so far: Following the narrow mid-term election victory of the U.S. Republican Party in the House of Representatives in November, California Congressman Kevin McCarthy waged a relentless campaign to become Speaker of the lower chamber of Congress. Facing a factionalised and conflict-ridden congressional conservative caucus, a record-making 15 voting rounds were conducted before Mr. McCarthy succeeded in acquiring the Speaker's gavel. With the Senate and



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reproductive rights, immigration, criminal justice reform, and more.

What is the role of the Speaker?

The Speaker, whose leadership of the House is mandated under Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, is elected at the beginning of a new Congress by a majority of the lawmakers in the chamber. The Speaker is second in line for the presidency, following the Vice-President, in the event of the President being incapable of continuing in office. While during the fledgling years of American democracy the Speakers of the House usually limited their role to presiding over House proceedings and serving as ceremonial heads, over the years they have increasingly and aggressively pursued a partisan policy agenda favouring majority control of the House. This shift has been mirrored by the bitter polarisation of the U.S. electorate, with Republicans and Democrats yielding on progressively fewer issues on which they are able to find common ground and allow genuine good governance to flourish for the betterment of all Americans.

In the case of Mr. McCarthy's leadership of the House, it is likely that Republicans will expediently launch congressional inquiries into the business dealings of Mr. Biden's son, Hunter; border policies aimed at blocking and deporting undocumented workers and stopping immigrants from "stealing American jobs."

What impact will Mr. McCarthy's proximity to Mr. Trump have?

The odds are high that Mr. McCarthy will subtly seek to promote the core values of 'Trumpism' and rush to the political aid of the former president by challenging last year's FBI search of Mr. Trump's residence at Mar-a-Lago, Florida, for classified documents. The new Speaker may also seek to investigate the oft-repeated false claim of the "stolen" 2020 election and ballot voting and the decision-making behind COVID-19-related school closures and vaccine mandates. Based on the Origination Clause — Article I, Section 7, clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution — the House is mandated with initiating revenue bills and could use its leverage in this regard to force financially painful federal government shutdowns as it has done in the past for political advantage. Mr. McCarthy has also hinted at ways in which House control by Republicans could impact foreign policy decisions of the Biden administration when he indicated that he would be averse to giving a "blank cheque" to Ukraine as part of U.S. and NATO support to the country, in

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What factors will limit the political reach of the speaker?

Mr. McCarthy's influence as Speaker will be constrained by the tenuousness of his grip on House conservative caucuses. While the Republicans managed to flip the House from Democratic control in the midterm election, the "red wave" that some predicted never happened and they now hold 222 seats in the 435-member chamber. This is almost as narrow a margin as what they had in 2001 (221 seats), implying that it would be a harder slog to get bills passed and crossvoting or abstentions by Republicans could be politically damaging. Mr. McCarthy's headaches are likely to multiply in the face of 15-vote political circus that he had to oversee to get himself elected as Speaker. While he has always been seen as a bridge-builder and a friendly face in Congress with ties to all camps under the Republican tent, the flipside of his success in lobbying and fundraising is that some factions now view him with suspicion.

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