**An Overdue Crisis in Washington**

[Juan Abbas](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/juan-abbas/" \o "More Articles by Juan Abbas)

October 6, 2023

September (into October) has been nothing but turbulent for Washington. Each time I approach the keyboard, something explosive happens and is usually centric on the legislative branch of government.

The month started with the news that House Republicans and the White House failed to reach an agreement on the new fiscal year’s spending budget. Now, spending disagreements happen every year, and the threat of government shutdowns has increased since the Trump Administration. Each year, becoming a novelty, lawmakers meet after their summer recess and create unwarranted hype and disagreement around the barrage of deficit, the U.S. currently retains. The government has previously shut down many times, however only twice with full Democratic control of the legislature; in 1980 and 1990. The rest of the 9, were in either one or both control of Republicans, with the most popular and recent one ending in 2019-the second shutdown hosted by the Trump White House.

So, what is a Government Shutdown? This is when no federal budget is enacted into law before the start of the new fiscal year. Essentially, the government cannot fund all its agencies through the October 1st deadline and stops paying employees, due to the lack of responsibility and authorization by Congress. Due to the very recent and public debate on the U.S. near-default in Q3 (June), Republicans took extra measures to prove their point and limit spending under the new year. This new year, of course, would lead up to an election year, where government agencies need more resources than ever to counter foreign interference attempts and domestic fraud. Regardless, at the 11th hour, Republicans and Democrats attempted to come to a very wise middle ground and figure out a 45-day extension to the shutdown. Just 2 hours in, Democrats were given less than an hour to go through a 75-page document.

The threat of government shutdowns has increased since the Trump Administration.

Now, while all this was happening, Republicans-especially the ‘Alt-Righters’-were handed an opportunity to get rid of the Speaker of the House, Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). McCarthy’s speakership bid was already desperate and uncertain in January. However, despite all odds (and multiple promises to the unhinged wing), after 15 votes, he managed to get his way and become House Speaker. The top voice against his bid, through January and many House hearings, was Rep. Matt Gaetz. Gaetz, who identifies as very anti-establishment, is the son of a Florida lawmaker who was ‘the establishment’, in local Florida politics. Gaetz Jr. Is also a big supporter of Former President Trump. He identifies with the exact Trump base and closely aligned himself with the White House after and preceding the events of January 6th. And since McCarthy hasn’t been the biggest supporter of President Trump, throughout the process of his legal troubles and January 6th, the top boss made calls to ensure the mainstream Republican establishment is removed from power. And so, finally, after 10 months of uncertainty, Gaetz brought the measure to remove McCarthy. At first, Democrats were apprehensive about removing McCarthy, since it would give a get-out-of-jail-free card to the extreme wings of the GOP. However, later the caucus sided with Republicans to oust McCarthy and so he was removed as House Speaker last night.

Maintaining the tradition of 11th-hour politics, the House of Representatives has now no Speaker and multiple aides scrambling to secure a seat orally in the top spot. Despite what anyone thinks, this has no impact on the Democratic Party. Other than the optics, it neither hurts nor benefits them. It only plays into this larger scheme of events by the GOP to secure the final Presidential nomination for anyone other than Trump. Losing speakership to a moderate Republican, or even a Democrat for the next year has fewer repercussions than having 200 extreme mindsets in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Trump as the ‘endorser-in-chief’.

It’s worth noting that McCarthy is the first speaker to be removed from speakership via vote. The vote came down to a bipartisan measure with a 216-210 majority for the ouster. New names are emerging from within the conference, including less controversial figures within his caucus, such as Elise Stefanik, though it’s unlikely she’ll have enough to secure a Speakership.

Now, in the Senate, the story is an extreme multitude of events. On 22nd September, Senator Bob Menendez was indicted on bribery charges and helping a foreign government through his influence on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The government in question is Egypt and the case, brought by the Southern District of New York, alleges that he accepted cash worth $500,000, gold bars and a luxury car in exchange for non-public information regarding the number and nationality of persons serving at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. This piece of classified State Department information was not the only exchange of ideas between himself and (allegedly) an Egyptian government official.

As the District Attorney for the Southern District of New York (SDNY) Damian Williams said: “My Office is firmly committed to rooting out corruption, without fear or favour, and any regard to partisan politics. We will continue to do so.”

SDNY prosecutors are known to not lose cases. Williams would not have brought the case if he felt there was substance to it. However, again, all of these are mere allegations. The senior Senator from New Jersey has been charged with bribery in the past and cleared of all allegations. After his acquittal, 7 years ago, he called out to the ‘people’ behind the case and that they were after his job. Perhaps, it’s true, perhaps it isn’t. This just displays a larger picture of the lack of trust in government. Menendez has stepped down as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee until he is cleared of all charges.

Finally, we come to the last order of business, which is the sad, and sudden demise of Senator Dianne Feinstein, who died Friday at the age of 90. A trailblazer in her work, she laid the foundation for many women in politics and was a mentor to many around the world. Her much-coveted Senate seat is now up for re-election next year. The void left by her absence has led much of Congress to attend her funeral service in her home state of California.

*The writer is a columnist and a linguistic activist.*