

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS - US Daily Brief 05-01-23

By Adam Burrowes

The White House

09:00 ET 14:00 GMT	President Biden receives his Daily Briefing
11:15 ET 16:15 GMT	President Biden delivers remarks on border security and enforcement
15:00 ET 20:00 GMT	Biden holds a Cabinet meeting

Elections Countdown:

- ❖ 2024 Presidential Election: 670 days

Speaker of the House of Representatives

The drama on the floor of the House of Representatives continued yesterday as Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) failed in three more ballots to become speaker.

- Yesterday's voting saw the bloc of Republican rebels from the House Freedom Caucus maintain robust opposition to McCarthy and McCarthy lose ground when Rep Victoria Spartz (R-IN) changed her vote from McCarthy to present, essentially abstaining from the ballot.
- Failure to elect a speaker leaves the House of Representatives inert and if the inaction persists until the Senate reconvenes on the 23rd of January, the entire legislative body will be in a state of paralysis.

Figure 1: House Speaker Votes by Ballot

Ballot	1	2	3	4	5	6
Jeffries	212	212	212	212	212	212
McCarthy	203	203	202	201	201	201
Jordan	6	19	20	0	0	0
Donalds	1	0	0	20	20	20
Other	12	0	0	0	0	0
Present	0	0	0	1	1	1

Source: Axios

The day finished with something of a win for McCarthy with the House agreeing to adjourn. The vote passed by a narrow one-vote margin with four Republicans voting with Democrats to keep McCarthy on the rack.

Reports from the early hours of this morning suggest that the pro-McCarthy bloc may have made progress in crisis talks with Republican rebels, but the situation remains fluid.

- McCarthy has reportedly agreed to a further raft of concessions to conservatives including lowering the “motion to vacate” threshold to one member. That would mean that any single Republican House caucus could force a no-confidence vote in the speaker at any time. Note: McCarthy had already pledged to reinstate the motion to vacate with a five-member threshold to trigger a vote.
- McCarthy has also reportedly agreed to a demand from Rep Ralph Norman (R-SC) to hold a vote on limiting lawmakers to three terms in the House.
- Politico reports that McCarthy is also prepared to give House Freedom Caucus members two seats on the powerful House Rules Committee - a key committee which oversees the amendment process in the chamber.
- McCarthy is also expected to promise to allow more input from lawmakers on the 12 annual appropriation bills, known as the omnibus. Passage of the 12-bill spending package during the lame duck session of Congress last month has been cited by McCarthy critics as justification for their rebellion, despite his opposition to the bill.
- Changes to the rules could see individual votes on each of the 12 bills and a more liberal approach to amendments. These changes may delay the appropriations process and increase the risk of a government shutdown.

Politico: “As of [01:00 ET] the thinking in McCarthy’s camp was that if they can winnow down his opposition from 20 to a half-dozen or so, the pressure on the remaining holdouts will be so great that enough will cave.”

- Insiders, however, believe that the hardcore anti-McCarthy bloc of Reps. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), Lauren Boebert (R-CO), Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Bob Good (R-VA), and Matt Rosendale (R-MO) are unlikely to be convinced by sweeteners. The group of five has a personal grievance with McCarthy which is unlikely to be satisfied by anything short of McCarthy’s withdrawal from the race. McCarthy will need to swing one of these votes or hope fatigue or circumstance compels Democrats to depart the chamber and miss a ballot.

Gaetz said on Fox News last night the stand-off would only end if either McCarthy “bows out” or promises “a fundamental” rewrite of House rules and hands key committees to conservatives.

- The headache for McCarthy is what kind of GOP caucus would he govern, if he wins, considering the extent of horse trading and concessions being dolled out to a fringe of the party.
- Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX) expressed the frustration of McCarthy allies, saying on Fox News: "We cannot let the terrorists win." During voting Crenshaw told reporters: "McCarthy would have to resign from Congress, then I'll consider an alternative — but I'll tell you what, whoever that 20 wants, I will never vote for that person. I do not care who it is."

Some McCarthy loyalists may start searching for an alternative candidate if they think rewarding the House Freedom Caucus for rebellion is too high a price to pay for a McCarthy speakership.

- Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO) voted for McCarthy on all six ballots but piqued interest when he told CNN that McCarthy should either cut a deal or step aside "at some point today [yesterday]."
- Several news outlets have referred to an "Aaron Sorkin scenario," wherein moderate Republicans cross the aisle to vote with Democrats for a unity speaker, but this remains a highly unlikely prospect.

One of the questions posed by yesterday's US Daily Brief was the role former president Donald Trump could play in influencing events. There was a suggestion that Trump could steer the rebels towards McCarthy as the anti-McCarthy bloc comprises some of Trump's most loyal supporters.

- That question was answered emphatically by Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO) who said in a nomination speech on the floor that Trump should withdraw his support for McCarthy: "Even having my favorite President call us and tell us we need to knock this off, I think, it actually needs to be reversed. The president needs to tell Kevin McCarthy that, sir, you do not have the votes and it's time to withdraw."
- Earlier in the day, Trump posted on social media: "REPUBLICANS, DO NOT TURN A GREAT TRIUMPH INTO A GIANT & EMBARRASSING DEFEAT. IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE, YOU DESERVE IT. Kevin McCarthy will do a good job, and maybe even a GREAT JOB - JUST WATCH!"

Democrats continue to both condemn Republican infighting and revel in the fragility of the GOP majority. Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) said: "This once-in-a-century humiliation of a party's nominee for Speaker is chickens coming home to roost for McCarthy, who whitewashed right-wing insurrectionism on the House floor. Nobody's getting killed now, but the House GOP now sleeps in the bed they made with Trump and Bannon."

- The drama is unlikely to have any immediate impact on national security or the legislative process if Republicans can elect a speaker before the end of the month.
- The House will gavel in again at 12:00 ET 17:00 GMT today to resume voting. McCarthy may call for an adjournment to continue negotiations but that would require a majority of all House Representatives and Democrats and hard-line conservatives are likely to vote that down.

Congressional Business

The House will convene at 12:00 ET 17:00 GMT to continue voting for the next Speaker of the House of Representatives

The Senate is out

Committee Schedule –

Border Security

President Joe Biden is reportedly preparing to make a trip to the Mexican border with the United States during the upcoming North American Leaders' Summit in a bid to confront one of the most politically sensitive issues facing his administration.

- Biden announced his intentions to visit the border following an event in Kentucky to celebrate the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY).
- Republicans have repeatedly criticised the Biden administration for its handling of the border crisis. The incoming Republican House majority has pledged to open investigations into Secretary of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and border policy regularly tops the list of Republican political concerns.

Biden may elaborate on his plan when he delivers remarks on border security today from the White House. Such a trip would indicate that the Biden administration feels sufficiently empowered to risk the poor optics of a border visit in order to demonstrate the administration is addressing the issue.

- Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA) said: "Maybe he should learn what's happening down there. Maybe he can do something. Maybe straighten the mess out and give us the help that we need."
- Axios: "Last month, the Supreme Court forced the Biden administration to continue the controversial pandemic-era border policy Title 42, which allowed for the immediate expulsion of some migrants, while legal challenges unfold. The decision may have been a political reprieve for Biden, but it didn't offer any resolution for the thousands of migrants crossing every day, at times straining local and federal resources."

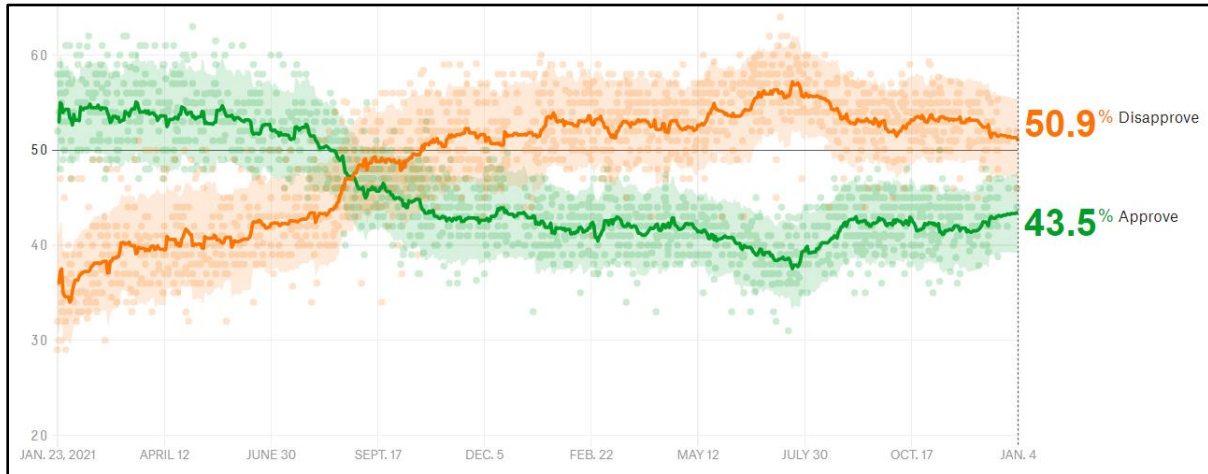
Poll of the Day

With the ongoing turmoil in the Republican Party, Democrats will be buoyed by President Biden's upward trend in approval.

- Biden endured rock-bottom approval for much of 2022 but received a bump following a string of legislative successes over the summer and then again after the US Midterm Elections in November.

- Biden is now polling favourably compared to most of his G7 colleagues.

Figure 2: President Biden Approval Rating



Source: FiveThirtyEight

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