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## Paul Ryan's retirement keeps the revolving door for GOP House speakers spinning

- *With House Speaker Paul Ryan confirming that he will not run for reelection, ending his three-year old speakership, Congressional Republicans are once again set to face turmoil in their pick for a leader.*
- *It's not clear why turnover is a hallmark of the job for Republicans. This behavior truly stands out when compared to the other side of the aisle.*

by JOSHUA SPIVAK

With House Speaker Paul Ryan confirming that he will not run for reelection, ending his three-year old speakership, Congressional Republicans are once again set to face turmoil in their pick for a leader. Ryan's stepping down shows the longstanding differences between how the two parties behave in treating their leaders.

Ryan is just the latest Republican leader who is leaving the job in a hurry. Ryan's predecessor, John Boehner, quit suddenly after less than five years in the speaker's chair and right before a presumed ouster campaign by the Freedom Caucus.

The obvious successor to Boehner, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, faced a backlash, which resulted in abandoning his efforts to be speaker once it became clear that too many Republican back-benchers would oppose him. McCarthy is considered a leading contender for the speaker role if Republicans keep their majority in the house.

The "quick hook" for Republican leaders is not a new development. Newt Gingrich was celebrated for his role in ending the GOP's 40-year trip in the minority wilderness after the 1994 midterm elections. But by 1997, the other Republican leaders were looking to remove him. A poor showing for the party in the 1998 election led to Gingrich's resignation from the House.

Gingrich's presumed replacement, Majority Leader Dick Armey, failed to get support for his race the speakership. This itself was noteworthy and the start of a trend for the GOP.

In 13 consecutive leadership changes after Gingrich, the speaker had held the position of either majority or minority leader (or, when the minority leader title was retired, minority whip).

The Republicans first seemed to choose the Appropriations Chairman Robert Livingston, who almost immediately step down due to a sex scandal, and then settled on a more junior deputy whip, the since disgraced Dennis Hastert. Hastert managed to stay as speaker for eight years, but once the party lost the majority, he was out as leader.

It's not clear why the presumably more conservative Republicans have such a taste for change in their leadership. During their long night in the minority, they were also willing to switch leaders. Joe Martin, the last Republican speaker before Gingrich, was ousted as minority leader by Charles Halleck, who was himself removed by Gerald Ford.

Ford's successor, John Rhodes, was threatened with a challenge before he stepped down, as did his successor, Robert Michel, who was facing a Newt Gingrich-led revolt if he tried to stay in the position.

In all of those fights, the Republicans were at least struggling to find a way back into power. They have now had the majority for 20 of the last 24 years, but still have been willing to cycle through numerous leadership changes.

This behavior truly stands out when compared to the other side of the aisle. The Democrats have had a relatively smooth ride. Despite their long stretch out of power, they have had only two leaders over the last 24 years.

Nancy Pelosi has managed to keep her job despite losing the majority in 2010. There is discussion of replacing Pelosi, but that appears to be more focused on Pelosi's role as a lightning rod for Republican attacks and a concern from Democratic candidates that Pelosi could cost votes and potentially seats in battleground districts.

It could be that the Democrats are not helped by their stability. After all, the Republicans' constantly changing leadership has not cost them control over the House. But it is difficult to say that the leadership, rather than other factors are what have kept the Republicans in power.

What is clear is that whoever succeeds Ryan as Republican leader should not get too comfortable in their seat. The Republicans in the House have shown that their conservatism in policy does not extend to their practical choice of keeping a leader.

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