Opinion
NCR Voices



Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-California, joined by other GOP members, talks to reporters just after voting to advance appropriations bills on the House floor, at the Capitol in Washington Sept. 26. (AP/J. Scott Applewhite)



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Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus shut down its operations in 2017 but is now trying to make a comeback with an "animal-free" show. Who knew it would be facing fierce competition from the U.S. House of Representatives?

How bad is it? July's congressional hearing about UFOs was one of the saner moments produced by the GOP.

Last week, one day after defeating an amendment to strip aid to Ukraine from the defense spending bill, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy reversed course, and the House voted to strip the funding from the bill. McCarthy promised a standalone vote on Ukraine aid, but removed it from the Pentagon funding bill in an effort to appease extremists in his caucus.

The extremists, egged on by Fox News anchor Laura Ingraham, behave like they are on Russian President Vladimir Putin's payroll, repeating Kremlin talking points and dismissing the sufferings of Ukraine with indifference.

The parliamentary gymnastics surrounding the Pentagon bill were part of McCarthy's effort to get a few appropriations bills passed, so that members of the "Freedom Caucus" would consent to passing a continuing resolution to fund the government while Congress works its way through the other appropriations bills. It didn't work.

"We don't have the votes for any CR [continuing resolution] on the Republican side," admitted McCarthy ally Rep. Kelly Armstrong of North Dakota.

Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz is one of the extremists leading the charge against McCarthy's effort to fund the government. Gaetz has been threatening to propose a motion to "vacate the chair," that is, to remove McCarthy as speaker. You will recall that back in January, it took House Republicans 15 ballots before McCarthy won enough votes to claim the gavel.

In a closed-door meeting of the GOP caucus last week, Gaetz's behavior was so outrageous, another member reportedly told him to "f--- off."

There have been government shutdowns before. Interestingly, it is usually the GOP that gets blamed, whether they are in control of Congress or the White House.

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In 1995-96, there was a 21-day shutdown when House Speaker Newt Gingrich squared off with President Bill Clinton. The political fallout rejuvenated Clinton's reelection bid and stalled Gingrich's efforts to reshape the government by cutting social programs.

In 2018, President Donald Trump had to cave in when Congress refused to fund his draconian immigration policies.

People instinctively realize that the anti-government party, the Republicans, is the culprit in these shutdowns. Democrats, who like deploying the power of government to achieve important societal objectives, are understood to be more averse to a shutdown.

This year, when the MAGA Republicans wield outsized power because of the narrow majority the GOP holds in the House, and seem to revel in creating chaos, you can bet responsibility for a shutdown will be placed squarely and appropriately on them.

The shutdown fight was not the worst of it in Congress last week. That honor falls to the House Oversight Committee's bizarre hearing on impeachment.

The GOP's first witness was George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley, who is also a frequent legal analyst on Fox News. On-air, he is not under oath. At the hearing, he was. The fire-breathers intent on impeaching President Joe Biden couldn't have been pleased when Turley, their own star witness, said, "I do not believe that the current evidence would support articles of impeachment."

It also was unhelpful when Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York pointed out that a screenshot of a text message, presented to the committee by Republican Rep. Byron Donalds of Florida, was fabricated. She held aloft the full text message, and the part that had been deleted by Donalds changed the entire

meaning of the words he had highlighted. Game, set and match to Ocasio-Cortez.

The more important sleight of hand the House GOP is attempting to pull off is to blame Biden for everything and anything his son Hunter did. They repeatedly failed to connect the son's deeds with the father. There is nothing in the Constitution about impeaching the son of a president.

Watching the clown show in the GOP-led House of Representatives has its comic moments, but in the end, it isn't funny. It is tragic. The rest of us will pay the price of a failed government on account of the MAGA Republicans' ability to yank McCarthy's chain and turn Congress into a circus. Bring back the lions and tigers.