

FEDS CHARGE THE DECIDING VOTE THAT MADE KEVIN MCCARTHY SPEAKER

I have to admit I was wrong about something.

For most of Nancy Pelosi's period as the Democratic Leader in the House (whether Speaker or Minority Leader), I mocked the way that Republican leaders in the House could not count votes without her help. I continued that mockery as Kevin McCarthy struggled to win the Speakership through 15 rounds of voting, until he won finally because six radical Republicans, including Matt Gaetz and Andy Biggs, voted present rather than against McCarthy finally.

But since then, McCarthy has managed a series of close votes with far greater success than Paul Ryan or John Boehner. Most remarkable was the vote on April 26 to hold the debt ceiling hostage, which Republicans passed with 217 yes votes, 215 no votes (including a handful of GOP flamethrowers, including Biggs and Gaetz), and 3 people – two Democrats and one Republican – not voting.

It undoubtedly surprised President Biden as well. He seemed to be counting on continued GOP dysfunction and so didn't fully prepare a Plan B if the GOP unexpectedly learned to count votes.

That's important background to the news – first reported by CNN – that EDNY has charged George Santos.

No one yet knows what the charges are (besides that there was a whole bunch of fraud involved). The abrupt departure of first Santos, then his staffers, from their office yesterday is the most we have to go on right now.

Federal prosecutors have filed criminal charges against New York Rep. George Santos, the Republican lawmaker whose

astonishing pattern of lies and fabrications stunned even hardened politicians, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

Santos is expected to appear as soon as Wednesday at federal court in New York's eastern district, where the charges have been filed under seal.

The exact nature of the charges couldn't immediately be learned but the FBI and the Justice Department public integrity prosecutors in New York and Washington have been examining allegations of false statements in Santos' campaign finance filings and other claims.

The congressman's attorney declined to comment. Spokespeople for the Brooklyn US Attorney's Office, the Justice Department and the FBI declined to comment.

Santos was en route back to New York Tuesday night, skipping House votes for the evening, according to a source familiar.

A spokeswoman for Santos, Naysa Woomer, would not respond to shouted questions from reporters Tuesday afternoon and abruptly departed the congressman's DC office with her backpack when asked about the federal charges against him. Prior to her departure from the office, CNN witnessed three staffers for Santos abruptly depart with their bags. They wouldn't talk when pressed for comment.

NYT reports the staffers have been told to stay away from the office today, as well, which may well be an attempt to give Santos time to read the charges and determine his own next steps.

All this developed while McCarthy was meeting with Biden and other Congressional leaders on the debt ceiling. The meeting did not go well –

in part because McCarthy accused Biden of lying when he said that to accomplish the cuts McCarthy demanded would include cuts to Veterans benefits. McCarthy came out of that meeting to the news of the adverse verdict against Trump in New York and the Santos charges.

Regarding Santos, the Speaker said he would not force Santos out of Congress unless he were convicted, which could leave a lame duck member in the seat for months or the balance of Santos' term.

But, again, no one knows what the charges are, nor do they adequately account for the possibility that some of the conduct could include the Ponzi scheme in which Santos had previously been involved or his significant financial relationship with Andrew Intrater, long suspected of serving as a proxy for his sanctioned cousin, Viktor Vekselberg. When someone has committed as much apparent fraud as Santos has, there's no telling what the real story behind all that fraud is.

So either McCarthy moves forward with the support – both for his Speakership and for his hostage-taking – of someone under active criminal investigation. Or McCarthy does something to trigger a vote on his continuation in that role.

I'm not, this time, going to underestimate McCarthy's ability to count votes or his willingness to capitulate to the most radical extremists in his caucus. But that's sort of the point: McCarthy is not just owned by Marjorie Taylor Greene at this point, he is owned by whatever alleged crimes imposter Congressman George Santos has committed.