Twitter Thread by Chad Pergram



Chad Pergram
@ChadPergram



1) The Hitchhiker's Guide to the New Congress Starting Today and the Election for Speaker.

2) Starting the new Congress is inherently messy in a pandemic. The House of Representatives implemented "remote voting" in the spring.

3) That's where the House permitted members who were at high risk, quarantining, tested positive or caring for someone who is ill could "phone in" their vote. The Hse will vote on Monday on a new "rules package" to begin the new Congress which will include a remote voting option

4) But in the House, you can't carry over rules from the 116th Congress to the 117thCongress.

That's why everyone has to show up at noon today.

This poses an interesting, ethical question:

5) Is it appropriate for members who have tested positive, have been in quarantine or been exposed, be present today?

Here's what to expect in the House today.

6) First, the House must take care of old business. The House meets, for the last time at 10 am et and adjourns the 116th Congress. The new, 117th Congress starts at noon et, per the Constitution.

7) Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO), an ordained United Methodist pastor, will lead the opening prayer to begin the new session.

Nothing has constituted the House at that point. There is no Speaker. Clerk of the House Cheryl Johnson presides.

8) The first order of business is a quorum call to get everyone there – pandemic style.

Under normal circumstances, all 435 House members-elect would crowd into the chamber to vote electronically and record their presence.

9) But during coronavirus, the House will summon members to the chambers in seven groups of about 72 persons. The first tranche starts with Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC) and runs through Rep. Michael Cloud (R-TX).

10) The seventh and final group stretches from Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) through Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-NY).

Members are instructed to report to the chamber, record their presence and depart. We expect it will take until a little after 2 pm et to get the quorum there.

11) Watch to see exactly how many members show up for the quorum. This will be crucial because it will dictate the size of the House to begin and how many votes House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) needs to return to the Speaker's suite.

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13) The House will entertain nominations for Speaker around 2:30 pm et. House Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) will nominate Pelosi. House Republican Conference Chairwoman Liz Cheney (R-WY) will nominate House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA).

14) The House will then begin a manual roll call with members filing into the chamber, again, in groups, and verbally announcing their vote. This will take until 5:30 pm et or later.

We expect the election of the Speaker sometime between 5:30 and 6 pm et.

15) Presumably, Pelosi wins and will be sworn-in by the Dean of the House (the longest-serving member), Rep. Don Young (R-AK). Pelosi in turn swears-in Young and begins swearing in members in groups of 72 members.

16) The House will observe a moment of silence to note the death of the late Rep.-elect Luke Letlow (R-LA).

The House should start at 432 members and three vacancies: 222 Democrats and 210 Republicans.

17) The vacancies are from New York's 22nd District, Louisiana's 5th District and Florida's 27th District – but the latter will be filled soon. There is still no race call in the contest between current Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) and former Rep. Claudia Tenney (R-NY).

18) Letlow died from complications related to coronavirus. Rep.-elect Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL) indicates she will not be present to take the oath office. So that's how we get to at least three vacancies to begin the new Congress. Possibly more.

19) Salazar could be sworn-in as soon as her health allows. And, the House could approve a resolution later this week allowing Salazar to be sworn-in outside of the Capitol. That's happened before.

20) Pelosi indicated she will seat Rep.-elect Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) after her six-vote victory over Democrat Rita Hart. But Hart has asked the House Administration to probe the outcome in that contest.

This is where it could get interesting.

21) You take the field today with the players you have available. That's why, in the age of a pandemic, it's possible - possible - that if Democrats don't have the right numbers, Republicans could - could - actually have the majority.

22) We always say it's about the math. It's about the math. It's about the math. Well, the math really matters today. Whichever side has the most members present today is in the majority.

Period.

23) The only thing which really matters as to which side has more votes is what comes next: election of the Speaker.

Nothing can happen in the House until it elects a Speaker.

Nothing.

24) And anything can happen during a pandemic. Even Pelosi has said that her foe in the Speaker's race is COVID.

The successful Speaker candidate secures an outright majority of the entire House. Not the most votes.

25) So, if the House starts at 432 members and everyone is there, Pelosi needs 217 members vote for her. So if Democrats are at 222 and everyone shows up, the Speaker can only lose five votes. Pelosi lost 15 votes in the Speaker's contest in January, 2019.

26) Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN) voted present in 2019. But Cooper now says he will vote for Pelosi. Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) voted "present" in 2019. Slotkin says she can't support Pelosi.

27) Reps. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) and Jared Golden (D-ME) voted for Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL) two years ago.

That's why some wonder if it could possible for the House to elect McCarthy or someone else as Speaker.

That scenario is unlikely. But it will come down to the math.

28) What if no candidate secures 217 votes? The House keeps voting until it picks a Speaker. A vote for Speaker hasn't gone to a second ballot since 1923. House Speaker Frederick Gillett (R-MA) finally prevailed on the fourth ballot.

29) The House burned two months and 133 ballots in 1856 before finally deciding Nathaniel Banks of Massachusetts was fit to be Speaker.

We just know it will take a long time to wrap all of this up. But we are advised that Sunday could be a very long day.