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*This story was originally published at 9:36 a.m.*

House Speaker John A. Boehner, faced with a constant conservative rebellion, announced Friday he will step down at the end of October, a move that shocked Capitol Hill and exposed the deep tensions within the Republican party over how to use its congressional majority.

Boehner’s nearly five-year hold on the speaker’s gavel had grown increasingly unsteady amid threats from more than 30 Republicans that they would force a no-confidence vote in his speaker’s position, which would have forced him to rely on Democratic votes in order to remain in charge.

*[What John Boehner told me the night before he said he was quitting]*

Conservatives have pushed Boehner and his leadership team to take a more confrontational approach with President Obama over issues such as government spending, abortion, immigration and Obamacare, a stance more moderate Republicans argue is completely unrealistic in a divided government.

Boehner said at an afternoon news conference that he made the decision to resign Friday morning.

“Last night I started thinking about this,” he said. “I woke up, I said my prayers, and decided today was the day I’ll do that. Simple as that.”

Boehner, a devout Catholic, said Pope Francis’s visit to Capitol Hill Thursday was “emotional,” and he teared up when recalling the pope asking him to pray for him in a private moment in the Capitol. But he said he had long contemplated stepping down — planning at one point to announce his retirement on his birthday in November — and said the papal visit did not inspire his decision to retire.

“I don’t want my members to go through this, and I certainly don’t want the institution to go through this,” he said of the expected challenge to his leadership from conservatives.

*[Sign up for The Daily 202, The Washington Post’s new political tipsheet]*

The shocking move, first reported by The New York Times, means there's unlikely to be a government shutdown next week. Following Boehner's announcement, House Republicans said there was agreement to pass a clean spending bill to keep the government open through mid-December while broader negotiations on spending levels are held. Several members of the Freedom Caucus, the conservative group which led the revolt against Boehner's leadership, said they will now support the spending bill without demands that it include language to cut off funding for Planned Parenthood.

"The commitment has been made that there will be no shutdown," said Rep. John Fleming (R-La.).

*[LIVE updates, analysis and reaction]*

The House intends to vote next week on a clean spending bill and then move on budget reconciliation legislation — where, Republicans said, both repealing the Affordable Care Act and stripping Planned Parenthood of funding will be considered.

Reconciliation bills are considered under special rules that require only a simple majority to pass and they cannot be filibustered in the Senate, which will allow Republicans to pick a veto fight with Obama over abortion policies.

Boehner's likely successor is House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), the No. 2 GOP leader who has been in office less than 10 years. While he has widespread support in the Republican Conference, many believe McCarthy lacks the political and tactical gravitas to be a force in the House.

He released a statement praising Boehner, saying his "depth of character is unmatched," but did not specify whether he would seek to replace him as speaker.

"Now is the time for our conference to focus on healing and unifying to face the challenges ahead and always do what is best for the American people," McCarthy said.

One potential rival to McCarthy is Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas), who in the past has been urged by conservatives to run for speaker or another top leadership post. His spokesman said Hensarling is "considering his options" and will have a decision by early next week.

House Ways and Means Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), his party's 2012 vice presidential nominee, said Friday he didn't want Boehner's job.

"This was an act of pure selflessness. John's decades of service have helped move our country forward, and I deeply value his friendship," Ryan said in a statement.

Congressional leaders from both parties praised Boehner after news of his resignation broke, with some Democrats openly worrying it's a sign that partisan tensions on the Hill could get even worse this fall as Congress debates how to fund the government and whether to increase the government's borrowing authority.

House Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), who has spent three decades in Congress, called Boehner's resignation — and the circumstances behind it — a “big loss for the country and a loss for this institution.”

“This is a victory for dysfunctional government,” he said just off the House floor. “This is a victory for confrontation. This is a victory for taking positions that one knows cannot and will not be adopted, and allowing the government to shut down, the debt [limit] to be breached and other things to happen if you don't get your way.”

*[The Fix: Boehner just sacrificed his career for the good of the Republican Party]*

During a joint press conference with Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Obama said Boehner's decision to step down “took me by surprise,” and he called the speaker shortly before facing reporters in the Rose Garden.

“John Boehner is a good man. He's a patriot,” said Obama, who had a friendly rapport—but often strained working relationship— with Boehner. “He cares deeply about the House. He cares about his constituents. He cares about America.”

At her weekly press conference, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called Boehner's resignation “a stark indication of the disarray” among House Republicans.

Pelosi had called Boehner Friday morning around 8:15 a.m. to check in on the status of the continuing resolution, but was told he was in a meeting and would call back. He never did.

She called his announcement “seismic.”

At the meeting, Boehner's surprise announcement was met first with stunned silence, several members said. His speech was described as a graceful, thoughtful announcement that received three separate standing ovations.

“It was a very quiet reaction,” said Rep. Reid Ribble (R-Wis.) “There were people shedding tears in there, and there was clearly a lot of respect for the speaker and the dignity in which he conducted his affairs.”

Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) said Boehner made his announcement by talking about it as part of a “healing process,” closing by praying the Prayer of St. Francis, the papal namesake.

The speaker joked about how closely he held his decision, not even telling McCarthy until shortly before House Republicans gathered Friday morning.

“I had to tell him five times,” Boehner said. “He didn't believe me.”

Conservatives who had been at odds with Boehner welcomed his resignation and portrayed him as out of touch with how politics is now being played.

“John was fighting the 21st century battles with 1990s tools, and you can’t just do that with a president of either party who is willing to push the envelopes of executive power,” said Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.) “When you go into a negotiation and say, ‘Look, the one thing we’re never going to do it shut the government down,’ you have completely given up your constitutional ability to use the power of the purse, and I think that is an abdication of responsibility.”

Boehner, who capped his career with Thursday’s address by Pope Francis, met with a handful of the most conservative Republicans after the papal address to lay out his plan to fund the government. But those rebels continued to agitate and threaten to force a vote at sometime in the near future to vacate his speakership.

A believer in the institution, Boehner decided to walk away on his own terms rather than relying on Democratic support or becoming the first speaker to lose the gavel midterm.

Boehner’s departure is rooted in deep conservative discontent with the way he has handled his majority — in particular, what they have seen as an unwillingness to stand up to Obama.

Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), who in July filed a motion to oust Boehner that accelerated talk of his demise, said little as he left the meeting room shortly after 10:30.

Boehner, he said, served with “class and humility.”

About Obama, Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.) complained: “He’s run circles around us since John Boehner was speaker of the House. I think it’s a victory for the American people.”

Huelskamp said it was “clear that he did not have the votes to remain as speaker unless Nancy Pelosi helped him out, which is obviously a very vulnerable position.”

“Obviously the pope had a big impact on him,” said Rep. Richard Nugent (R-Fla.) “That’s about the most selfless act I’ve ever seen, willing to step down to save this country and save this nation.”

The resignation sets up a bruising leadership race that will represent a long-delayed open clash between conservative and establishment Republicans.

“We don’t simply want to move the deck chairs around,” said Fleming.

Many Republican presidential candidate echoed the comments of House conservatives, playing to the anti-Washington

sentiment among GOP voters that has helped define the campaign.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), who regularly allied with House conservatives to force fights that stymied Boehner, learned of the news at the end of a press conference on religious liberty. After saying that leadership decisions were up to the party in the House, he launched into a criticism of Boehner's tenure while never mentioning the retiring speaker's name.

"I have long called on Republican leadership to do something unusual, which is lead," said Cruz. "Go actually stand up and honor the commitments that we made to the American people."

Asked if he felt that McConnell should also resign, he demurred, then insisted he was trying to help them answer the concerns of actual voters. "I would love to sing their praises as leaders of the conservative movement."

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), also running for president, mentioned Boehner's resignation at Friday's Values Voter Summit, to huge applause.

Rubio called on conservatives to "turn the page" and "allow a new generation of leadership in this country."

"And that extends to the White House and the presidency as well," he added.

National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) said he was not aware of Boehner's plans and said it's time for the party to rally around McCarthy.

"I don't know what he and the Pope talked about yesterday," Walden said of Boehner, whom he praised. "If this was a message from God, I wish he'd send a different message"

Boehner, 65, was first elected to Congress from his southwest Ohio district in 1990 and began a roller coaster ride that brought him into the leadership fold early, only to be expelled in a rank-and-file rebellion, and then begin a long and steady rise back into leadership. That culminated with the historic 63-seat gain that propelled Republicans into the majority and handed Boehner the speaker's gavel.

Almost immediately several dozen new Republicans, claiming the tea party mantle, began clashing with Boehner and opposing his moves. Deep into year four of his tenure, Boehner privately decided to step down but his likely successor — then-House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) — lost a stunning upset in his GOP primary, according to aides.

Without a senior Republican to take the gavel, Boehner stayed on in the hopes of steadying the ship and possibly helping elect a Republican president. That path became untenable this month as the conservative rebels plotted to force votes against Boehner, which would have meant that his Republicans would have to keep taking votes putting them in a political bind with conservative voters back home.

"I do know this, I'm doing this today for the right reasons and I know that the right things will happen as a result," Boehner

said as he concluded his news conference.

*Dave Weigel, Kelsey Snell, Jose DelReal, Juliet Eilperin and Ed O'Keefe contributed to this report.*

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