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Conservative Revolt Splits House GOP Group

Key members of the RSC plan on starting a competing organization that they see as a real conservative caucus.

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Rep. Mick Mulvaney is one of the key lawmakers planning to leave the RSC. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

January 13, 2015 House conservatives are plotting a mass exodus from the Republican Study Committee as soon as next week over simmering dissatisfaction with the group's direction.

The members have been talking for weeks, and they met Monday night to formalize their plans to institutionalize a competing, invitation-only organization that they see as a real conservative caucus that can push Speaker John Boehner rightward. Once a bastion for the conservative movement, the RSC has strayed too far from its original mission and been co-opted by the same party leaders it is meant to exert pressure upon, the members believe.

Republican leaders will be watching closely: Any divisions among conservatives might dilute the Right's ability to influence the leadership on key issues like immigration and spending, though the RSC has always been stocked with independent-minded members who never really took marching orders from the group anyway.

The new group, which does not yet have a name but is expected to include more than 30 members, is being de-facto led by former RSC Chairman Jim Jordan, although the formal leadership structure could change. It will also include Rep. Mick Mulvaney, who lost an election to become the chairman last year, disappointing many conservatives. The other founders are Reps. Justin Amash, Ron DeSantis, John Fleming, Scott Garrett, Raul Labrador, Mark Meadows, and Matt Salmon. Most but not all of those members are expected to renounce their RSC memberships, along with other members who will join the group.

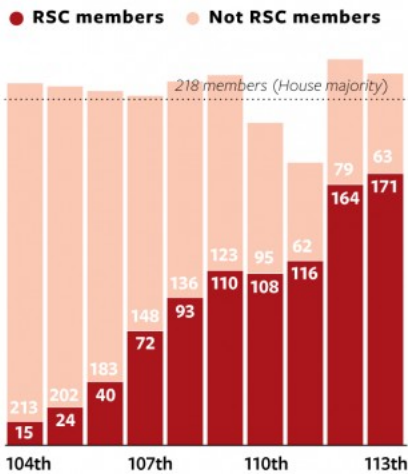
Many of the members will meet Tuesday evening with Sen. Ted Cruz to discuss their plans and other matters over pizza, though Cruz himself has not been involved in the formation of the new group. Cruz's chief of staff, Paul Teller, [was fired](#) [<http://www.nationaljournal.com/congress/rsc-fires-executive-director-for-leaking-member-level-talks-to-outside-groups-20131211>] from his role as RSC executive director in 2013 after provoking the ire of party leaders and some members of the group.

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The Majority's Majority

The Republican Study Committee's membership has grown since the group's rebirth in 1995. The RSC's share of House Republicans has risen as well, from 7 percent to 73 percent.

Republican Study Committee membership by Congress



Sources: House clerk; Republican Study Committee; staff research

"We've had some discussions, and certainly there are several members that are concerned about the direction of the RSC and want to have an organization that reflects the diverse viewpoints of Republicans at home," said Amash, one of the members expected to leave the RSC.

The new group is a direct rebuke of RSC Chairman Bill Flores, who after he won election over Mulvaney told the press that he does not believe the RSC's core mission should be to put pressure on leadership. But the tensions go further back. Before Flores, Rep. Steve Scalise—now the majority whip—won election as the group's chairman over Rep. Tom Graves, whom the now-disaffected members saw as the more conservative candidate. Scalise also fired Teller, angering some members.

But Flores said Monday that he is not concerned. He said the RSC is still the only group that can not only outline policy but also influence votes on the House floor.

"I'm not too worried about it," Flores said Monday. "If you want to be part of a caucus that has the ability to move the needle, we're the ones that do that. We're the largest, most effective caucus in Congress."

The new group is separate from Amash's libertarian-leaning group, the House Liberty Caucus, although it does include several of the same members. And unlike that group, the new one is going to be supported by dues, which will allow the members to hire a designated staff to carry out their agenda.

The members are also planning a retreat sometime in the next couple of

months to lay out their next steps.

Some members may be dissuaded from formally leaving the RSC because in order to vote in November's chairmanship election, they signed a pledge to pay dues. But at the very least, the members plan to stop participating in RSC meetings, even if they continue to pay their dues.

Apart from dissatisfaction with the outcome of the races for RSC chairman, members believe the group has become too unwieldy because of its swollen size. Though it started in the 1990s with just a handful of members, the RSC swelled to more than 170 members in the 113th Congress.

On its website, the RSC is described as a place where "a minority of committed men and women without years of seniority or formal leadership positions can affect change." But with more than two-thirds of the GOP conference in the RSC—and many of the members not playing an active role—lawmakers who do not regularly attend the weekly group meetings hold sway over its elections and general direction.