

Some in House skittish over Kevin McCarthy getting No 2 GOP post

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By KEVIN FREKING

WASHINGTON — Some conservatives are skittish about having a new House majority leader from left-leaning California.

Rep. Charles Boustany, R-La., acknowledged that his constituents were "probably scratching their head" when it came to Rep. Kevin McCarthy's election Thursday, but he understands McCarthy represents a conservative district.

Adding to the unease is that the House's top Democrat, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, also is from California.

"I don't think you'll have to worry about the two of them working together too much," countered Rep. John Fleming, R-La.

McCarthy's Bakersfield-focused district is much more conservative than the rest of the state. Among registered voters, Republicans outnumber Democrats there by a 16-percentage-point margin. In the 2012 presidential election, Mitt Romney took almost 57 percent of the vote.

The Republican tendencies reflect a region that relies on agriculture and oil production.

Fleming said the California connection played into his lobbying efforts to get colleagues to vote for Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., to succeed McCarthy in the No. 3 job, majority whip.

"We've been gradually becoming South-centric in terms of that's where the red states are. Yet our leadership is primarily from outside of the red-state area," Fleming said. "It's not to say we won't have good leadership from outside. We just need a little more balance. "

McCarthy ascended to majority leader after Rep. Eric Cantor's primary election defeat in Virginia. While some lawmakers voiced concerns leading up to the race that the party's leadership didn't come from where the GOP is strongest, geography seemed to take a backseat in the contest.

"I get this all the time. If you're from California, conservatives across the rest of the country go 'whoaaa,'" said Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif. "But, California, I tell people, is like the rest of the country. And there are parts of California that are as conservative as any part of the country."

McCarthy's voting record has become more moderate while serving as whip, partially reflecting his siding with leadership on some critical votes that were unpopular with the vast majority of his Republican colleagues.

For example, he was one of only 28 Republicans who voted to extend the Treasury's borrowing authority, which must occur for the government to borrow more money to pay all of its bills. If Congress had not acted, economists say it would have created a loss of confidence in U.S. issued bonds, leading to higher interest rates for the government, businesses and consumers.

Nearly half of California's GOP representatives supported the measure. By comparison, not one of the 24 GOP lawmakers from Texas voted to increase the debt ceiling, nor did any of the nine GOP lawmakers

from Georgia, or any of the seven each from fellow deep-red states Indiana and Tennessee.

Nunes said conservatives shouldn't be worried.

"There's probably very little that Nancy Pelosi and Kevin McCarthy are going to agree on," he said.

McCarthy was asked on Fox News Sunday about his voting record and the concerns from some Republicans that he's not conservative enough.

"Who rates what's conservative? Check my voting record, check what I believe and look what I've done," McCarthy said. "When they wanted to bail out Wall Street, I said 'no' twice. When they wanted to raise taxes, I've always said no. I have a philosophical belief that this Constitution matters."

McCarthy represents a district in which about one third of the residents are Latino, and earlier this year, he voiced support for providing legal status to some immigrants who are in the United States without permission. But he said Sunday "there's nothing until we secure the borders."