Democrats signal shift to the right for 2018 campaign

Patrick Martin
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The annual meeting of the Democratic National Committee, held in Las Vegas October 18-21, showed that party operatives are preparing for the 2018 election year with a distinct shift to the right in personnel, policy and candidates.

DNC Chairman Tom Perez, installed by the Clinton wing of the party establishment in a narrow victory over Representative Keith Ellison, a Sanders supporter, nominated a slate of candidates for top party committees that excluded several longtime activists who backed Sanders against Clinton in the campaign for the 2016 presidential nomination.

Among those removed from the executive committee were James Zogby, the highest-ranking Arab-American on the DNC; New Hampshire state party chairman Ray Buckley; longtime DNC Secretary Alice Germond, and Barbra Casbar Siperstein, the first transgendered member of the DNC. All either supported Sanders against Clinton, or Ellison against Perez, or both.

Initial press reports highlighted the protests by the former Sanders supporters, portraying the shake-up in the DNC committees, particularly the executive committee and the rules committee, as a "purge" of "dissenters," although the actual policy differences involved are minimal.

Buckley told NBC News, "I understand the chair can do as he pleases, but still, it's all just very disappointing." Zogby tweeted, "this doesn't bring the party together. It deepens the divide at a time we need all hands on deck for '18 & '20."

There was also criticism of Perez for including former chair Donna Brazile on his slate of 75 at-large members for the DNC, given her role in 2016 when she gave Clinton a preview of questions before candidate events held on CNN. Her role was made public when WikiLeaks published Brazile's contemporaneous emails. Another Perez selection was Manny Ortiz, a lobbyist for the huge Wall Street bank Citigroup.

The rules committee is particularly sensitive, since it will be charged with implementing the recommendations of a special Unity Reform Commission created by Clinton and Sanders as part of his agreement to endorse the Wall Street favorite after she corralled the majority of Democratic convention delegates.

The commission is drawing up recommendations on changes in state rules for delegate selection, including the role of so-called "super-delegates," elected officials and DNC members who are given votes at the convention in addition to those delegates elected in primaries and caucuses. Virtually all super-delegates, the personification of the party establishment, backed Clinton.

While the Unity Reform Commission was balanced between Clinton and Sanders supporters, the rules committee that will receive its report and take action is stacked 5-0 in favor of former Clinton supporters, following the removal of Buckley.

Perez denied that there was any effort to remove former Sanders supporters or punish them. A spokesman used identity politics to justify the changes in composition, claiming that the Perez slate of committee members and at-large nominees "reflects the unprecedented diversity of our party's coalition" by increasing the number of Native American, gay and Puerto Rican members, as well as trade union officials.

Jane Kleeb, chair of the Nebraska Democratic Party and a Sanders supporter, criticized the diversity claims, telling *Huffington Post*, "It's not only misdirection, but it's also divisive." She added, "It continues to paint the Bernie people as not caring about our native and Latino and black brothers and sisters, which is complete

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nonsense."

At one point on Friday, Karen Carter Peterson, DNC vice chair of civic engagement and voter participation, accused Sanders and Ellison supporters of seeking to remove black women from party leadership, citing, among others, Donna Brazile.

In another demonstration of the right-wing character of the party leadership, Perez named as a deputy finance chair of the DNC Dan Halpern, a former chairman of the Georgia Restaurant Association and past board member of the National Restaurant Association. Both these organizations are strident opponents of any increase in the minimum wage, let alone the $15-an-hour minimum to which the Democratic Party is nominally pledged.

Another effort to attack the Sanders camp was turned back Friday when the DNC rejected by voice vote a resolution urging Sanders to "register or affiliate with the Democratic Party" rather than continuing to hold his Vermont Senate seat as an independent. Zogby called this an effort that "puts salt in a wound that we need to be closing right now."

In a cosmetic effort to cover up the corporate domination of the party, the DNC adopted language rejecting contributions from "corporate donors that conflict with our DNC platform." This had been rejected by the platform committee but was then approved by the full DNC.

While described as "anti-corporate," the measure's real significance can be judged by its chief sponsor—Christine Pelosi, the daughter of longtime Representative and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and her multimillionaire real estate investor husband Paul Pelosi. Ms. Pelosi was ludicrously described in press accounts as "a San Francisco activist," with no mention of her family connection.

In his closing address to the DNC meeting on Saturday, Perez sought to cover up the right-wing shift in the party with a blast of anti-Trump demagogy. He denounced Trump as an "existential threat" to the nation. "We have the most dangerous president in American history and one of the most reactionary Congresses in American history," he told his audience.

From the standpoint of the Democratic Party, however, the danger posed by Trump is not the danger of a nuclear war on the Korean peninsula or the attack on democratic rights and social benefits at home, but rather the completely unsupported claims that Trump was elected because of Russian intervention in the 2016 elections, and thus embodies a Russian takeover of the White House.

The anti-Russia campaign is the main focus of congressional Democrats, who are otherwise seeking to engage the White House in collaboration on questions such as immigration, tax and budget policy, and infrastructure, while joining with the Republicans in bipartisan support for military operations in Korea, the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe.

The anti-Russia campaign is given a particularly sinister character by the recruitment of a half dozen former CIA and military intelligence officers to run as Democratic candidates in critical marginal seats in the House of Representatives.

As the *Washington Post* put it, in a report published on the newspaper's website October 18, "The spooks have come in from the cold, and they're running for Congress."

Three former CIA officers are seeking the Democratic congressional nomination in key districts, including: Abigail Spanberger in Richmond, Virginia; Elissa Slotkin in Brighton, Michigan; and Jeff Beals in a Hudson Valley district in New York state, where one of his opponents for the Democratic nomination is former Army intelligence officer Patrick Ryan.

Gina Ortiz Jones, a former Air Force intelligence officer, is running in a Texas district where the incumbent Republican, Will Hurd, is a former CIA agent. Still another intelligence operative, Jay Hulings, a staff member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, is also seeking the nomination to challenge Hurd.

Spanberger cited Trump's derision of the CIA's finding of alleged Russian interference in the 2016 elections, telling the *Post*, "It is wholly unfortunate that the president—at least through his actions and words—isn't appreciating what they [the CIA] do."

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