

Alabama Senate election pits corporate Democrat vs. fascistic Republican

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Tuesday's Senate special election in Alabama, called to fill the seat occupied by Republican Jefferson Sessions before his confirmation as attorney general, is a nauseating mud fight between two reactionaries and a further milestone in the US political establishment's shift to the right.

Polls show Republican Roy Moore, an evangelical former prosecutor and ex-judge on the Alabama Supreme Court, with a slight lead over Democrat Doug Jones. The campaign has attracted substantial national attention, with national Democrats funneling in millions of dollars for Jones, while President Trump held a pro-Moore rally in Pensacola, Florida Friday, only a few miles from the Alabama state line.

Trump's former chief political strategist, Stephen Bannon, currently chief executive of Breitbart News, will headline a major rally Monday night in Dothan for Moore.

The Republican Senate candidate is the latest manifestation of an odious thread in American political history: the toxic combination of religious backwardness, outright racism, and faux-populist attacks on northern cities for their cultural and moral degeneration.

That he may soon find himself in the US Senate is an indictment of both the Republican Party, which has catered to fascistic evangelical southerners for decades, and the Democratic Party, whose pro-corporate agenda has paved the way for the growth of right-wing populism. The Democrats' right-wing strategy in the present campaign has focused almost entirely on highlighting allegations of Moore's sexual misconduct while ignoring his fascistic program.

This year, Moore has called for the criminalization of homosexuality, praised the pre-Civil War south as the last time the United States was "great," and referred to Asian and Native American people as "yellows and reds." In November, he called for sending the military to guard the

US-Mexico border to "stop illegal aliens from coming across our border within a matter of weeks." Following in the worst tradition of segregationist southern governors like George Wallace, Moore is best known for violating a 2003 federal court order mandating he remove a giant statue of the Ten Commandments that he erected at the Alabama Supreme Court building.

The Democratic Party is largely ignoring these issues, instead running on an essentially Republican program aimed at appealing to wealthy residents and avoiding any appeal to the social needs of the working class. In focusing its attention on Moore's alleged sexual misconduct many decades ago, and seeking to win upscale suburban women rather than working-class voters away from the Republican Party, the Jones campaign is replicating the exact political formula that led to Hillary Clinton's defeat by Trump in 2016.

Incapable and unwilling to mobilize opposition against Moore through appeals for social reform, the Democratic Party has instead engaged in gutter politics viewed by many within Alabama as a conspiracy by powerful East Coast interests. In early November, after the *Washington Post* published allegations that Moore forced himself upon a number of women, the Democratic Party made these allegations the central focus of its campaign, eschewing attacks on Moore's fascistic political beliefs.

The Jones campaign has spent \$5 million on TV and radio advertising—ten times more than Moore—largely to spread salacious details of the allegations. The *New York Times* reported that Jones' "well-funded campaign ... is using glossy mailers to highlight vivid details of the young women's allegations, trying to cut through the fog to humanize the accusers and show that they are credible."

Meanwhile, Jones has publicly proclaimed his right-wing bona fides, calling accusations of his "ultra-liberalism" to be "pretty absurd." He boasts of his support

for “lower taxes on the middle class, against deficits, for a strong military and for your right to see a doctor whenever you’re sick.”

The Democratic Party is billing a Jones victory as an opportunity to cut taxes and further transform Alabama into a cheap labor source for corporate exploitation. Over the last two decades, Alabama has become a manufacturing center, bringing in massive factories for companies like Airbus, Mercedes-Benz, Hyundai, and Honda.

The *Washington Post* revealed much when it noted, “Supporters of Jones say with concern that a win Tuesday by the firebrand Moore would derail the state’s efforts to escape its painful history and rebrand itself as a forward-thinking place welcoming to Fortune 500 companies and a highly educated workforce.”

In other words, the Democratic Party and its press care little about the impact of a Moore election on the democratic rights of LGBT people, African-Americans, immigrants, and of the working class more broadly. Instead, citing the fact that “competition with other states for corporate investment is fierce,” the *Post* quotes George Clark, president of the corporate lobbying group Manufacture Alabama, who frets that Moore’s election would be a “negative ... it’s like recruitment in football—it will be used against you.”

Jones’ prospects for election are particularly in question given his campaign’s difficulty in mobilizing African-American voters, who make up 26 percent of the electorate and the base of the Democratic vote.

As a result of widespread lack of support for either candidate, turnout is expected to be a dismal 25 percent of eligible voters, and among the impoverished African-American working class, turnout is expected to be even lower. A *New York Times* reporter noted that during a recent visit to an Alabama Walmart, six in ten African-Americans “said they were not aware that a Senate race was underway.”

This telling anecdote is an indictment of the Democratic Party, which has abandoned any program based on social reform and lost the ability to communicate even the date of a special election to its supposed voting base.

Racist voting restrictions implemented without real opposition by the Democratic Party will also limit working class turnout. There is no early voting or same-day voter registration in Alabama, and in 2015, the Republican-controlled state legislature closed 31 Department of Motor Vehicle locations to block voters from registering. The *Atlantic* wrote: “of the 10 counties

with the highest percentage of nonwhite voters, the state closed DMV offices in eight, and left them without offices entirely, meaning those voters either had to travel long distances ... in order to vote.”

These restrictions were implemented in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2013 ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder*, where the court effectively annulled section 5 of the Voting Rights Act and eliminated the requirement that states with Jim Crow laws obtain preclearance from the federal government before implementing changes to voting protocols. The Democratic Party made no efforts to so much as force a vote in Congress to block such discriminatory restrictions.

While Moore waves his bible and Jones his *Washington Post*, Alabama’s infant mortality rate has risen to 9.1 deaths per 1,000 births, almost double the national average. A tuberculosis outbreak took place last year in the rural city of Marion. There is only one company selling health care plans on the Obamacare exchange, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and premiums have risen 223 percent since 2013.

The UN has dispatched a Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty to Alabama. The official recently saw raw sewage flowing through homes into open pits and reported the prevalence of hookworm. He said, “I’d have to say that I haven’t seen this” in a first world country. Neither candidate will lift a finger to address these questions of life and death.

The author recommends:

How not to fight Judge Roy Moore

[14 November 2017]

Stephen Bannon’s Southern strategy and the Alabama Republican primary

[26 September 2017]



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