

Democratic leadership backs right-wing military-intelligence primary candidates

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A tape recording made in January and leaked last week to the *Intercept* captures House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, the number two Democrat in the House of Representatives, telling a liberal candidate for the Democratic nomination in the Sixth Congressional District of Colorado that he should pull out in favor of the choice of the party leadership, Iraq War veteran and former paratrooper Jason Crow, who is now a well-connected corporate lawyer.

The liberal candidate, “green” capitalist Levi Tillemann, had previously denounced Hoyer’s intervention and released notes of their discussion, but the tape recording provides a more detailed picture of the electoral strategy being pursued by the Democratic Party leadership in 2018.

With Crow engaged in a primary contest against two more liberal opponents, Tillemann and David Aarestad, a lawyer for the University of Colorado and health care activist, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) gave Crow its highest token of support, designating his candidacy as part of the “Red to Blue” campaign. The DCCC has poured money into the district to support him.

Aarestad withdrew from the race last month under pressure from Washington, but Tillemann has refused to do so.

The recording is from a face-to-face meeting at the Denver Hilton between Hoyer and Tillemann. Hoyer can be heard saying, “Staying out of primaries sounds small-D democratic, very intellectual and very interesting. But it was clear that it was our policy and our hope that we could, early on, try to come to an agreement on a candidate that we thought could win the general, and to give that candidate all the help we could give them.”

Hoyer has personally given \$4,000 to Crow’s campaign, while his AmeriPac political action committee has donated \$10,000. Other big money Democrats have backed Crow, swelling his campaign coffers to \$1,260,000 as of the latest filing with the Federal Election Commission, on March 31. Tillemann, a developer of electric vehicles and former adviser to the Obama Energy Department, has raised \$278,000, while Aarestad had raised \$139,000 before withdrawing.

Similar interventions have been reported in Democratic primary campaigns in Texas, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Minnesota, California and other states. In virtually every case, the party leadership has favored the more right-wing candidate against those who described themselves as “progressives” or hailed from the Bernie Sanders wing of the party.

The transcript of the Hoyer-Tillemann conversation deserves quotation at some length, because it gives a glimpse of the ruthlessness and unvarnished cynicism of the Democratic Party leadership:

Hoyer: Levi, obviously I wanted to talk to you about this congressional race.

Tillemann: You would like me to get out of the race.

Hoyer: You keep saying I would like you to get out, and of course that’s correct.

Tillemann: I know you’re fundraising for Crow.

Hoyer: Yeah. I’m for Crow. I am for Crow because a judgment was made very early on. I didn’t participate in the decision.

Tillemann: So your position is a decision was made very early on before voters had a say. That’s fine because the DCCC knows better than the voters of the Sixth Congressional District, and we should line up behind that candidate.

Hoyer: That’s certainly a consequence of our decision.

Tillemann goes on to reproach Hoyer for breaking with previous pledges that the Democratic leadership would not interfere in congressional district campaigns. This pledge was issued in the wake of the political scandal produced by WikiLeaks’ revelations in the summer of 2016, making public internal emails of the Democratic National Committee showing that DNC officials had sought to manipulate the outcome of the contest for the presidential nomination, supporting Clinton over Sanders.

Tillemann: You guys are shoveling money at him.

Hoyer: We’re going to continue.

Tillemann: You’re going to continue to do it?

Hoyer: We are going to continue to do it, and the reason,

Levi, we're going to do it is because a decision was made to focus. It was clear that was our policy and our hope that we could, early on, try to come to an agreement on a candidate that we thought could win the general, and to give that candidate all the help we could give them so that we would have a unified effort going into a general election.

Tillemann: Which means effectively, Congressman Hoyer, I'm running a campaign against Crow, and against you, and against the DCCC, because you guys are on Crow's side.

Hoyer: Yeah. You know, frankly, that happens in life all the time.

Much of the conversation reads like it was plagiarized from *The Godfather*, as Hoyer emphasizes that there is "nothing personal" in the Democratic leadership's decision to favor Crow over Tillemann. It's just politics, he says, echoing a Mafia boss' assurance to his victim that "it's just business."

But Hoyer went on to suggest a vicious smear campaign against Tillemann was just around the corner, comparing his challenging the choice of the Democratic leadership to the campaign of the fascistic Judge Roy Moore in Alabama, who bucked his own party leadership, won the Republican nomination and then lost the general election, costing the Republicans a previously safe seat. "Of course you're not that person," he reassured Tillemann, in effect suggesting that he was.

DNC Chairman Tom Perez has declared that there will be no repetition of the 2016 intervention by the party leadership to rig the result of the 2018 primaries to choose Democratic candidates. But House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Hoyer, her longtime deputy, are brazenly defending such intervention.

At her weekly press conference Thursday, Pelosi aimed her criticism at Tillemann for taping his conversation with Hoyer and then releasing it to the press. She said, "I don't see anything inappropriate in what Mr. Hoyer was engaged in—a conversation about the realities of life in the race as to who can make the general election."

Neither the report in the *Intercept*, published Thursday, nor the dozens of press reports that followed have taken note of the most politically important aspect of Hoyer's intervention: the flood of candidates for Democratic congressional nominations with backgrounds in the military, the CIA or other intelligence and national security agencies such as the State Department and the National Security Council.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in its series "The CIA Democrats," published last month, Crow "is a veteran of the 82nd Airborne Division, leading a paratrooper platoon during the invasion of Iraq. He then joined the Army Rangers and served two tours in Afghanistan 'as part of the

Joint Special Operations Task Force,' where he rose to the rank of captain."

Crow is only one of more than 50 candidates with such backgrounds, most of them recruited and promoted by the Democratic leadership in the most competitive districts, such as the Sixth District in Colorado, which includes the eastern suburbs of the Denver metropolitan area. Incumbent Republican Mike Coffman has held the seat for 10 years, but voters there backed Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump by a sizeable margin in 2016.

In Texas, for example, there are runoff contests in nine congressional districts on May 22 to choose the Democratic nominee. In three of the most high-profile contests, a candidate with a military-intelligence background, lavishly funded and backed by the party leadership, faces a poorly funded candidate claiming to be a progressive or former Sanders supporter.

In the 21st Congressional District, Joseph Kopser, a West Point graduate, Iraq War veteran and Pentagon consultant with a campaign war chest of \$1,125,000, faces Mary Wilson, a math teacher and minister who has raised only \$71,000.

In the 23rd Congressional District, Gina Ortiz Jones, an Air Force intelligence officer who served in Iraq and then in the Pentagon, with \$1,025,000 raised for her campaign, faces Rick Trevino, another poorly financed teacher and "progressive activist," who has raised only \$24,000. The DCCC has selected Ortiz Jones for its "Red-to-Blue" program.

In the 31st Congressional District, Mary Jennings Hegar, a former helicopter pilot in Afghanistan who won notoriety by suing the Pentagon to allow women in combat roles, with \$458,000 in campaign funds, faces Dr. Christine Mann, an osteopath who has raised \$71,000.

There are numerous other primary contests in the coming month where military-intelligence candidates are favored to win Democratic congressional nominations, including May 8 in West Virginia (two districts), Ohio, and North Carolina; May 15 in Pennsylvania (four districts) and May 22 in Kentucky.



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