

US primary elections show deepening political polarization

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Primary elections held in four states Tuesday gave a glimpse of the continuing political polarization in the United States. Working people are moving to the left, expressed in a distorted way in the votes cast in the Democratic primaries for candidates claiming to be progressive and even “socialist.” But the Democratic Party’s main candidates in campaigns for federal office were drawn from the military-intelligence apparatus.

Media attention was focused on the results of the primary in Pennsylvania, by far the most populous state where votes were cast Tuesday. Pennsylvania has 18 congressional districts, compared to a total of 10 districts in the other three states combined, Oregon, Nebraska and Idaho.

In the statewide primary in Pennsylvania, incumbent US Senator Robert Casey and incumbent Governor Tom Wolf, both Democrats, were renominated without opposition. The Republican primary winners were Representative Lou Barletta, a Trump-style anti-immigrant demagogue, who will face Casey, and State Senator Scott Wagner, who will face Wolf.

The most hotly contested statewide race was the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor. Braddock Mayor John Fetterman, who had the backing of Bernie Sanders, defeated the incumbent, Michael J. Stack, who was under investigation for abuse of authority and financial irregularities. Governor Wolf adopted a position of neutrality, tacitly supporting Fetterman.

In the 2016 election, in addition to Trump’s narrow victory in Pennsylvania, giving him the state’s 20 electoral votes, Republicans won 13 of the 18 congressional seats in the state. But as the result of court-ordered redistricting, which struck down gerrymandered district boundaries set by the Republican-controlled state legislature, and the mounting unpopularity of the Trump administration, Democratic votes exceeded Republican votes in 12 of the 18 districts Tuesday, and the total

Democratic vote statewide was at least 100,000 more than the Republican.

Four incumbent Republican congressmen decided not to run for reelection in new district boundaries more favorable to the Democrats, while several others face more difficult reelection campaigns than in past years. As many as eight Republican-held seats could be vulnerable in Pennsylvania, meaning that the state could supply one-third of the 23 seats needed by Democrats to win control of the House of Representatives.

In the other three states, only a single congressional seat is considered “in play” in 2018. That is the Second District of Nebraska, where Republican Don Bacon ousted incumbent Democrat Brad Ashford in 2016, and Ashford had the backing of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee to win back the seat this year.

However, in a political embarrassment for the Democratic establishment, social worker and health care activist Kara Eastman, running as a supporter of “Medicare for all,” defeated Ashford for the nomination and will face Bacon in the fall. Eastman had the backing of most “progressive” groups within the Democratic Party.

The most striking result Tuesday was the primary victory of four candidates for the Pennsylvania state legislature backed by the Democratic Socialists of America. Two of the candidates, Summer Lee and Sara Innamorato, are DSA members. They defeated Democratic incumbents Paul Costa and Dom Costa, who are cousins, in two Pittsburgh-area districts, winning 65 percent and 68 percent of the vote, respectively. The other two candidates, running in the Philadelphia area, were supported by the DSA but did not belong to the organization.

The DSA is a pseudo-left group within the Democratic Party, which claims that the Democrats can be pushed to the left through primary campaigns like that waged by

Bernie Sanders in the 2016 presidential election. It is opposed to the political mobilization of working people outside of and against the Democratic Party, the only way that the working class can establish its independence of capitalist politics.

The shift to the left among working people and youth, particularly in response to the attacks on democratic and social rights by the Trump administration, has produced a significant growth of the DSA over the past year. A DSA member won a seat in the Virginia state legislature in last November's statewide election.

The response of the Democratic Party establishment to the signs of radicalization among working people has been to promote candidates recruited largely from the military-intelligence apparatus.

In Pennsylvania, no less than seven candidates with military-intelligence backgrounds initially sought the Democratic nominations in five congressional districts: Rachel Reddick, a Navy veteran; Shelley Chauncey, a former CIA operative; Chrissy Houlahan, a former captain in the Air Force; George Scott, a career military-intelligence officer; Alan Howe, a retired Air Force officer; Christina Hartman, who worked for the National Democratic Institute, a longtime CIA front, in Sudan and South Sudan; and Conor Lamb, a former Marine Corps prosecutor.

Chauncey and Hartman ended their candidacies after the court-ordered redistricting radically changed the congressional district boundaries, in some cases drawing in new candidates and forcing others out. Reddick lost the race in the First Congressional District, in Philadelphia's northern suburbs, to a self-funded multi-millionaire, Scott Wallace, the grandson of Vice President Henry Wallace and chief executive of the Wallace Global Fund.

Chrissy Houlahan was unopposed for the Democratic nomination in the Sixth District, covering the southwest suburbs of Philadelphia, where incumbent Republican Ryan Costello retired. With a \$2 million campaign war chest, she is expected to win easily over the Republican nominee, Greg McCauley.

Lamb was unopposed for the Democratic nomination in the 17th District, covering part of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh) and Beaver County. The former Marine won a special election in March in the old 18th District, but the court redrawing of boundaries moved him into the same district with Republican Representative Keith Rothfus, setting up an unusual incumbent vs. incumbent race. Far more Democrats voted in the 17th District primary than Republicans, in keeping with voter registration totals in

the reconfigured district, suggesting that Lamb has the advantage in the November general election.

In the 10th District, a Harrisburg-area seat, George Scott defeated Alan Howe and two other candidates for the Democratic nomination to face Republican incumbent Scott Perry. Scott has a remarkable background for a congressional candidate. He was an active duty Army intelligence officer for 20 years with deployments in Korea, Panama and the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

"After several years of specialized training," according to his campaign website, he "began serving at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) as a brigade intelligence officer, battalion executive officer, and chief of the Division's analysis center." He later deployed to Jordan, where he was embedded with the Jordanian military, before deployment to Kuwait during the buildup to the 2003 Gulf War.

Scott's final assignment, according to his campaign website, was "to the Presidio of Monterey, CA, where he commanded the 229th Military Intelligence Battalion, a unit of over 1,800 personnel, preparing highly trained linguists for specialized service in units around the world."

After retiring in 2004, he returned to his native state and became a Lutheran minister and now a Democratic candidate for Congress. Scott is one of the most flagrant examples of what the WSWs has called the "CIA Democrats," the dozens of 2018 congressional candidates who come to capitalist politics from the intelligence agencies, command of combat units in Iraq and Afghanistan, or civilian positions in the Pentagon and National Security Council.



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