

California Democratic Party leadership snubs Feinstein in reelection bid

Dan Conway
17 July 2018

The California Democratic Party leadership delivered a public snub to the reelection campaign of Senator Dianne Feinstein last weekend by endorsing her opponent, State Senator Kevin de Leon. The decision by the Democratic state central committee has no actual effect—Feinstein and de Leon, both Democrats, placed first and second in the June 5 “jungle primary” and therefore will be the sole candidates appearing on the November ballot.

Nor is the action likely to prove much of an obstacle to Feinstein’s reelection. The five-term US senator won by far the most votes on June 5, 44.2 percent to de Leon’s 11.5 percent, and in November is expected to win most votes cast by Republican voters as well, since there is no Republican candidate on the ballot and she is considered the more conservative of the two Democrats.

Feinstein was previously rebuffed by the state Democratic convention in February, where 54 percent of the delegates backed de Leon, just short of the 60 percent margin that would have brought him the official Democratic endorsement before the June 5 primary. The state central committee vote was far more lopsided, 217 out of 333 backing de Leon. Feinstein received only 7 percent of the executive committee vote.

The action appears to be an effort to distance the Democratic Party from the stench of Feinstein’s right-wing record, particularly questions of national security and democratic rights, and put on a “left” face in the run-up to the November 6 election.

In addition, in the cynical electoral calculations of the Democratic leadership, putting the party’s seal of approval on a prominent Hispanic candidate is seen as a means of boosting turnout among Hispanic voters, to the benefit of Democratic candidates in several close

contests for the House of Representatives. The national leadership of the Democratic Party has targeted at least 7 Republican-held seats in California as part of the effort to gain 24 seats nationally and thus a majority in the House.

Democratic state vice-chair Daraka Larimore-Hall spelled out these considerations, issuing a statement hailing the endorsement of de Leon. “Kevin de Leon represents the future of the Democratic Party—a solidly progressive legislator who can see things like Medicare for all and moving forward on climate justice are the things that really energize our base in the long run,” she said.

This is the first time in decades that the California Democratic Party has refused to endorse an incumbent in the general election. It is also the second time that Feinstein herself has been snubbed by the party apparatus. The first was in 1990 during her unsuccessful run for governor, when she was deemed unacceptable due to her open support for the death penalty.

Appearing on CNN on Sunday, de Leon celebrated his latest endorsement. “Earning the endorsement of so many leaders and activists of the California Democratic Party isn’t just an honor and a privilege,” he gushed. “Today’s vote is a clear-eyed rejection of politics as usual. Now is not a time for complacency or someone to plead patience and hope that perhaps with fingers crossed that Donald Trump could learn and become a good President in the future.”

De Leon is referring to openly conciliatory remarks made by Feinstein towards Trump. In an infamous question-and-answer held by the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco in April 2017, Feinstein encouraged the audience to have patience with Trump and have hope that he would “learn and change.”

Feinstein, as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, has also recently upset liberal Democrats with her promise to carefully vet rather than oppose or block the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, Trump's arch-reactionary pick for Supreme Court justice.

A fixture in the US Senate since 1992, prominent in California Democratic Party politics for five decades, and married to immensely wealthy real estate investor Richard Blum, Feinstein is still the heavy favorite in November. She has a campaign war chest of \$7 million, compared to less than \$1 million for de Leon. In a June U.S.C Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* poll, Feinstein led de Leon by 36 percent to 18 percent among registered voters.

Perhaps Feinstein's greatest advantage, however, is de Leon's own identification with the big business politics of the Democratic Party. He is himself part of the political establishment, having risen to a leadership position in the State Senate before being term-limited out of office. His candidacy was widely described in the media as an effort to put himself in the line of succession to Feinstein when the 85-year-old senator eventually steps down, or to keep his name in front of voters for some other statewide office in the future.

The Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Senate, David Moore, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that there was no real difference between Feinstein and de Leon. "The action by the Democratic state committee is an attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of voters," he said. "Feinstein's record is so right-wing that the Democrats are worried it will hurt them in the fall campaign for the House of Representatives, but they are responsible for her 26-year tenure in the Senate, supporting imperialist wars and attacks on democratic rights."

Moore received more than 24,000 votes in the June 5 primary, the most for any independent candidate on the ballot, and more than candidates nominated by the Peace and Freedom Party and Green Party. This vote was a significant indication of popular support for a socialist alternative to capitalist politics.

Unlike the New York Democratic primary campaign of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, de Leon did not have the backing of the Democratic Socialists of America or the Sanders wing of the Democrats in the June 5 primary. In fact, two pro-Sanders candidates were on the ballot

against both him and Feinstein. After his runner-up finish, however, several trade unions that backed Sanders, such as the California Nurses Association, endorsed de Leon in the general election.

While de Leon certainly doesn't have the ugly political track record of Feinstein, a long-time stalwart defender of US imperialism and its crimes, he is nonetheless a thoroughly conventional party figure whose career is bound up with years of austerity politics in Sacramento.

Serving as State Senate President pro tempore between 2014 and 2018, de Leon presided over the continued erosion of public education and the continued growth of private charter schools throughout the state. Local police in California, as throughout the US, regularly murder innocent civilians without consequence. The state has been ravaged by a series of fires, floods and other natural disasters that have devastated entire communities as a result of severe underfunding of disaster services and infrastructure.

Most recently, de Leon had nothing whatsoever to say about Governor Brown's recent deployment of National Guard troops to the California/Mexico border to aid with Trump's anti-immigrant crackdown.

With an extensive immigrant population and an increasingly restive working class, the state of California is a major center of popular opposition to Trump. Anti-Trump protests began with his 2016 election victory—he lost California by a huge margin, more than 4 million votes. The recent protests against the forcible separation of immigrant parents and their children have attracted thousands and in the major cities, tens of thousands.

The Democrats are not seeking to lead this opposition but rather to smother it, and so protect the capitalist system. This can be said equally of both the "traditional" and "left" wings of the Democratic Party. Exposing the class role of this party of big business is a crucial task for working people. Workers and youth must recognize that in both parties of big business, they are facing their greatest political enemies.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact