

Primary results show rightward shift of both Republican and Democratic parties

Patrick Martin
9 August 2018

The primary elections held in Michigan, Missouri, Kansas and Washington, along with a special congressional election in Ohio, showed the continued shift to the right by both of the major capitalist parties. Popular revulsion toward the Trump administration is mounting, but the Democratic Party offers no real alternative.

Most attention in official political and media circles was paid to the special election in the 12th Congressional District of Ohio. The seat has been held for the past 38 years by Republicans, but was vacated last year by the resignation of Representative Pat Tiberi, who quit to take a lucrative post heading an Ohio business lobby.

State Senator Troy Balderson, who is 56, won the Republican nomination in a May 8 primary, narrowly defeating an even more right-wing opponent. Franklin County Recorder Daniel O'Connor, 31 years old, won the Democratic nomination in a multi-candidate race. Despite the dominance of the Republican Party for four decades—John Kasich held the seat for 20 years, then Tiberi for 18 more—polls quickly showed a tight race, with anti-Trump sentiment fueling a swing to the Democratic Party, particularly in the Columbus suburbs, the most populous part of the district.

As of this writing, Balderson was clinging to a narrow lead of about 1,700 votes out of some 200,000 cast, with nearly 8,500 absentee and provisional votes still to be counted. The Republican candidate's current lead of 0.9 percent was only a few hundred votes above the threshold set by Ohio law, which mandates a recount if the difference between two candidates is 0.5 percent or less. This means that after the counting of absentee and provisional votes, a full recount is quite possible, which would push back into September any final determination of the outcome of the vote.

The special election decided who will serve for the unexpired portion of Representative Tiberi's term,

through the end of this year. The same two candidates will appear on the November 6 ballot to decide who will hold the seat for the next two years.

Despite the short-term practical impact of the election, both corporate-controlled parties poured in resources, although the Republicans devoted far more, including nearly \$4 million in advertising in the Columbus media market, and a last-minute appearance by President Trump at a rally for Balderson on August 4. The main concern in the Republican leadership was to avoid the embarrassment of losing a long-held seat only three months before the general election, thereby avoiding a panic among Republican candidates and office-holders.

The Democratic campaign in the Ohio election was decidedly right-wing, with O'Connor seeking to appeal to upper-income Republican voters in upscale suburban areas. He soft-pedaled any overt opposition to Trump, avowed his willingness to work with the president and the congressional Republicans, and declared he would not vote for House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi to become speaker of the house because she is supposedly too liberal. At the same, he professed his opposition to any cuts to Medicare and Social Security and criticized the "corporate tax giveaway" represented by last December's Trump administration tax cut.

The primary elections held on Tuesday decided the Democratic and Republican nominations for US Senate in Michigan, Missouri and Washington, and for governor in Michigan and Kansas, as well for 36 congressional seats across the four states. Democrats currently hold all three Senate seats while the Republicans hold the two governorships. Republicans hold 23 of the 36 congressional seats.

The Democratic primaries saw a virtually across-the-board failure of the campaign by Bernie Sanders and newly nominated Democratic congressional candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who backed similar left-

talking candidates for Democratic nominations in these states.

The most important result was the easy victory of Gretchen Whitmer, the choice of the party establishment and the trade unions, in the contest for the Democratic nomination for governor of Michigan. She defeated two rivals: former Detroit City Health Director Abdul El-Sayed, who was backed by Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, and self-financed multi-millionaire businessman Shri Thanedar. Whitmer, the former minority leader in the Michigan State Senate, won 52 percent of the vote, compared to 30 percent for El-Sayed and 18 percent for Thanedar. Whitmer will now face Republican Bill Schuette, the state attorney-general, in the November election.

Either Sanders or Ocasio-Cortez also campaigned for congressional candidates in Kansas and Missouri who were defeated Tuesday. These were Brent Welder, a union lawyer who sought the Democratic nomination in the Second Congressional District of Kansas, and Cori Bush, who challenged incumbent Democratic Representative William Lacy Clay in the First Congressional District of Missouri.

Two other candidates backed by Sanders and/or Ocasio-Cortez—James Thompson in the Fourth District of Kansas and Rashida Tlaib in the 13th District of Michigan—did win Democratic nominations, but both had significant support in the party establishment as well. Thompson was the Democratic candidate in the special election for the same seat last year, while Tlaib, a former state legislator, had the endorsement of the *Detroit Free Press* and the Michigan Education Association.

In Kansas, Trump intervened in the Republican gubernatorial primary to support anti-immigrant bigot Kris Kobach, the Kansas secretary of state, against incumbent Jeff Colyer, who had moved up from lieutenant governor when Governor Sam Brownback took an appointment as Trump's special envoy for religious freedom. As of this writing, Kobach was leading Colyer by fewer than 200 votes out of 300,000 cast in a contest that appeared likely to go to a recount, which would be overseen by Kobach's office. The winner will face Democratic State Senator Laura Kelly.

In the congressional races, all 30 incumbents who chose to run again were renominated by their parties, with little opposition. The six open seats were vacated by four Republicans and two Democrats. Long-time Democrat John Conyers was forced to resign last year as part of the #MeToo campaign, based on unproven allegations of

sexual abuse of employees, while the others retired rather than seek reelection.

The congressional primaries confirmed the headlong move to the right by the Democratic Party signaled by the rise of a cadre of former military and intelligence operatives running as Democratic candidates for Congress.

In the Eighth District of Michigan, Elissa Slotkin easily won the Democratic nomination to challenge incumbent Republican Mike Bishop. Slotkin served three tours of duty as a CIA agent in Baghdad during the Bush administration, before returning to Washington and holding Pentagon and National Security Council positions under the Obama administration. She is also a multi-millionaire heiress to Hygrade Foods, founded by her grandfather.

In the 11th District of Michigan, Haley Stevens had a significant lead in a five-way contest for the Democratic nomination to replace retiring Republican Representative David Trott. Stevens was chief of staff for the Obama administration's automotive task force, making her a key architect of the 50 percent wage cut imposed on all newly hired autoworkers as part of the bailout of the industry. The auto giants returned to profitability with government financing, while autoworkers saw jobs, wages, benefits and working conditions shredded.

The choice of two such nominees—a CIA official linked to the worst war crimes of the 21st century, and the organizer of an onslaught on working class wages and conditions—sums up the class character of the Democratic Party—a party of imperialism and Wall Street.

Another military-intelligence candidate, Matthew Morgan, was expected to become the nominee of the Democratic Party in Michigan's First Congressional District, where he was disqualified from the ballot for a technical error on his nominating petition, but mounted a write-in campaign without any opponent.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact