

Ocasio-Cortez to support Pelosi as top Democrat and House Speaker

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Newly elected Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez announced over the weekend that she is likely to support longtime Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi to become Speaker of the House when the Democratic caucus votes on the nomination November 28.

Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, told her nearly 800,000 Instagram followers that Pelosi was the most progressive of the potential candidates for Speaker. She said that the opposition to Pelosi was coming from the right-wing of the Democratic caucus, not the left.

“My standard in this is: I’m going to support the most progressive candidate that’s leading the party, and right now, that is Nancy Pelosi, in terms of the running. I would like to see new, younger leadership, but I don’t want new leadership that’s more conservative.”

Pelosi heads a trio of near-octogenarians who symbolize the sclerotic character of the Democratic Party. The prospective Speaker of the House is now 78. Steny Hoyer, the likely Majority Leader, is 79, while Jim Clyburn, the likely Minority Whip, is 78. All held the same positions when the Democrats last controlled the House of Representatives from 2007 to 2011.

Ocasio-Cortez claimed that the House Democrats needed to “transform our leadership,” but that apparently does not include removing Pelosi, who in turn has endorsed Hoyer and Clyburn. Hoyer has the public support of at least 155 House Democrats, a clear majority of the caucus, while the only announced opponent to any of the top three, Representative Diana DeGette of Colorado, dropped her challenge to Clyburn Monday. It now appears that when the Democratic caucus votes on November 28, there will be only one candidate for each of the top three positions.

It is in fact true, as Ocasio-Cortez said, that the public campaign against reelecting Pelosi as the leader of

House Democrats is spearheaded by the right-wing of the party in Congress. That only testifies, however, to the right-wing character of the party as a whole. For all the claims by Ocasio-Cortez and her DSA supporters that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left, even Pelosi—who blocked the impeachment of George W. Bush and ensured continued funding for the Iraq War—is considered too liberal by a sizeable faction.

On Monday the leaders of the anti-Pelosi campaign released a letter signed by 11 returning representatives and five newly elected members, pledging to vote against Pelosi in January when the House of Representatives begins its new session with Democrats in the majority. A half dozen other Democrats have made similar pledges but did not sign the letter.

While positions like Majority Leader and Majority Whip are chosen by the party caucus, the Speaker is elected by the entire 435-member House, and thus requires 218 votes. With the Democrats currently set to hold a majority of 234-201, if more than 16 Democrats refuse under any circumstances to vote for Pelosi, she would fall short of the majority and would fail to become Speaker.

The anti-Pelosi letter was organized by three representatives: Tim Ryan, of Youngstown, Ohio, who ran against Pelosi in 2016 and fell well short, losing 134-63; Kathleen Rice, from Long Island, the former district attorney of Nassau County; and Seth Moulton of Massachusetts, a former Marine Corps officer with four tours of duty in Iraq, who helped organize the influx of military-intelligence candidates into the Democratic congressional caucus this year.

Of the eleven newly elected military-intelligence Democrats, seven have publicly declared their opposition to Pelosi, including the two former CIA agents, Elissa Slotkin and Abigail Spanberger, and five

military veterans, Jared Golden, Jason Crow, Max Rose, Conor Lamb and Mikie Sherrill.

While preaching a message of generational change from the current geriatric leadership, the organizers of the anti-Pelosi campaign have made it clear that they advocate a shift to the right on “cultural” issues like abortion and gay marriage, as well as on foreign policy.

The anti-Pelosi campaign has been unable to recruit a candidate against Pelosi, Hoyer or Clyburn. Press reports indicated the organizers were urging Representative Marcia Fudge, a leader of the Congressional Black Caucus from Cleveland, to run for Speaker, but she announced Tuesday she would support Pelosi.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus, now numbering nearly 100 members, met with Pelosi last week and issued a statement effectively endorsing her, in return for a pledge that “CPC members are represented proportionally on the key exclusive committees” and that she envisions “more elected leadership positions that CPC members can run for.”

The *New York Times*, house organ of the Democratic Party, published a glowing tribute to Pelosi in its Sunday magazine, under the headline, “Nancy Pelosi’s Last Battle,” which hailed her leadership qualities while giving a glimpse of her right-wing politics. Pelosi told her interviewer, Robert Draper, that her long service on the House Intelligence Committee had demonstrated that “we could always find our way in a bipartisan manner.”

She outlined numerous possible areas of agreement with the Trump White House, including infrastructure and health care, and was described as “smirking” at calls for impeaching Trump or abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the spearhead of Trump’s brutal crackdown on immigrants and asylum seekers. The profile described Pelosi as a practicing Catholic, married to a real estate and investment multi-millionaire, “with little in common with—and at times little patience for—the new generation of activists in her party, to whom she sometimes refers as ‘the lefties’.”

The prospect of a protracted stalemate in January over the election of a new Speaker was always remote, given the enormous pressure being brought to bear on Democratic representatives from the leadership itself, which controls committee assignments, as well as from groups like the AFL-CIO, MoveOn.org, and Emily’s

List, and top Democratic Party fundraisers.

The backing for Pelosi by Ocasio-Cortez, as well as the public statement by Ilhan Omar, another “left” Democrat, who represents an inner-city district in Minneapolis-St. Paul, that she will vote for Pelosi, makes a successful challenge even less likely.

That the Democratic Party is now choosing between the continued leadership of Pelosi, one of the richest members of Congress and a diehard defender of Wall Street and American imperialism, and an even more right-wing figure backed by the militarist Seth Moulton and his group of “CIA Democrats,” only testifies to its reactionary character.

Ocasio-Cortez has been heavily promoted, not only by the DSA, but by a large section of the corporate media and the Democratic Party establishment itself, to give the Democratic Party a “left” cover while Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer pursue an accommodation with the Trump administration.

Pelosi’s office issued a gushing tribute to Ocasio-Cortez in appreciation of her backing for Pelosi, noting that the Democratic House leader had met with Ocasio-Cortez “numerous times” in the past week.

“Congresswoman-elect Ocasio-Cortez is a dynamic and engaging leader with an extraordinary gift for connecting with young people who may be getting involved in politics for the first time,” said Pelosi spokesman Drew Hammill. “Her groundbreaking use of social media is engaging and energizing a whole new level of grassroots.”



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