Democrats nominate Pelosi as House speaker, reelect top aides

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In a clear demonstration that the Democratic takeover of the House of Representatives will produce no significant shift in US capitalist politics, the House Democratic Caucus has reelected its three top leaders, 78-year-old Nancy Pelosi, 79-year-old Steny Hoyer and 78-year-old James Clyburn.

All three are indelibly associated with the right-wing record of the Democratic Party during its last period in control of the House of Representatives, from January 2007 to January 2011, when Pelosi was House speaker, Hoyer was majority leader and Clyburn was majority whip.

During the first two years, with George W. Bush in the White House, Pelosi and her two top aides blocked any effort to impeach Bush for the lies that paved the way for the war in Iraq, while supporting full funding of the murderous US military interventions in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Pelosi has adopted a similar stance in relation to a possible impeachment of Donald Trump, whose assault on the Constitution is even more flagrant than that of Bush.

During the next two-year period, under the Obama administration, the Pelosi-Hoyer-Clyburn leadership spearheaded passage of the reactionary Affordable Care Act, whose purpose was to shift the cost of health care from corporations and the government onto the backs of working people; pushed through the Dodd-Frank legislation, which gave a slap on the wrist to the Wall Street criminals who caused the 2008 financial crash; and lavishly funded the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, under Obama's leadership, and the expansion of drone warfare throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

The Democrats were swept out of power in the House of Representatives in the 2010 elections, in large measure because of popular disappointment with the failure of the Obama administration to provide any serious remedy for the economic slump that followed the 2008 Wall Street crash. Obama and the Democrats bailed out Wall Street but pushed through wage cuts for auto workers and other sections of the working class.

After eight years in the minority, the Democrats recaptured a House majority in the November 6 elections. They were the entirely undeserving beneficiaries of the broad popular hostility to the Trump administration and the Republicans, which under the US political system can find no electoral expression except in a vote for the other half of the two-party duopoly, in this case, the equally right-wing and pro-corporate Democrats.

Wednesday's caucus vote follows several weeks of maneuvering and horse-trading by the Democratic leadership, mainly involving small groups of representatives whose perspective and program is generally more right-wing than Pelosi's. These include the Blue Dogs, a group of several dozen Democrats committed to fiscal austerity; the Problem-Solvers Caucus, a bipartisan group of 12 Democrats and 12 Republicans; and an informal "stop Pelosi" group spearheaded by Seth Moulton of Massachusetts, an Iraq War military officer, and Kathleen Rice, a former prosecutor from Long Island.

Pelosi met with Moulton, Rice and Representative Tim Ryan of Ohio, who ran against her in 2016 but declined to do so this year, just before the House Democratic caucus meeting. Moulton said afterwards that they pressed Pelosi to outline a "transition" in leadership—i.e., to announce that this would be her last term as Democratic leader—but she declined to do so.

By contrast, Pelosi had the full and unreserved support of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, the two newly elected representatives who claim membership in the Democratic Socialists of America, as well as other candidates hailed by the pseudo-left because of their racial or gender identities: Ayanna Pressley of Boston (the first African-American representative from Boston),

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Sharon Davids of Kansas City (the first Native American lesbian representative), Ilhan Omar of Minneapolis (along with Tlaib, the first Muslim woman representative), and so on.

In the caucus vote Wednesday, Pelosi prevailed easily, 203–32. The 32 votes against her were only half the 63 votes won by Ryan two years ago, when he challenged Pelosi for reelection as minority leader.

Pelosi was compelled to negotiate with the right-wing caucuses only because the speaker, unlike the majority leader or minority leader, is chosen by all 435 members of the House of Representatives, requiring 218 votes for election. The 203 votes she received in the caucus ballot was 15 votes short of the 218 she will need in January, when the new House session begins.

Many of those voting against Pelosi Wednesday had pledged to oppose her for speaker during their election campaigns, mainly to appease right-wing criticism of Pelosi's supposed liberalism.

In an effort to secure the necessary votes for January, Pelosi crafted a cynical process for the caucus vote, allowing representatives to cast "no" votes against her even though she was the only candidate nominated, so they could cite the caucus vote as proof that they had honored their campaign promise.

Although the vote was supposedly by secret ballot, representatives who so desired were even encouraged to take selfies with their "no" votes so they could prove in future electoral campaigns that they had opposed Pelosi, even after they cast a vote *for* Pelosi in January, when the vote really counts.

As *Politico* wrote, summing up the cynical maneuvering: "The unusual move allows members from swing districts who ran on a platform of opposing Pelosi to say they did so when they return home. In fact, Pelosi allies have actually encouraged some members-elect to oppose her in caucus so they can tell constituents they tried to push her out of the job—and then back her during the more critical Jan. 3 floor vote to officially become speaker."

For all other leadership positions no such elaborate pretenses were required, since a simple majority of the caucus decided the winner. Accordingly, for the other two top positions where there was only one candidate, House majority leader and House majority whip, Hoyer and Clyburn were elected by acclamation.

The lesser positions in the Democratic leadership were filled in part by acclamation and in part by contests. Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico, who headed the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which oversaw the vetting and nomination of Democratic candidates—mainly to promote the most right-wing candidates, particularly those with a military-intelligence background—won the position of assistant majority leader, effectively the number four leadership position, without opposition.

In the contest for chairman of the Democratic Caucus, the number five position, Hakeem Jeffries of Brooklyn, New York, defeated Barbara Lee of Oakland, California, by 123–113. This was billed as a largely generational contest, since Jeffries is 48 and Lee, 72, and without political significance, since both are members of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Progressive Caucus. However, Lee was the only member of Congress to vote against the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force after the 9/11 attacks, which Bush cited as the legal basis for his invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. She also voted against the USA Patriot Act.

Pelosi coopted potential opponents by creating several new lower-level leadership positions for which they could run, including the assistant majority leader position set aside for Luján, and various subordinate positions on the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Voting for these offices continued into Wednesday evening and perhaps into Thursday.

In another significant initiative, Michigan Representative-elect Elissa Slotkin, one of the two former CIA operatives elected as Democrats on November 6, drafted a letter to Pelosi on behalf of the incoming freshman class, which numbers 62 newly elected Democrats, asking the Democratic leadership to set aside positions on the powerful Appropriations, Rules, Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Financial Services committees for new members. Slotkin also asked for two freshmen to be seated on the Steering and Policy Committee, which decides on committee assignments and sets legislative strategy.

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