

New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand: Another right-wing Democrat enters the 2020 race

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Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York announced January 15 on “The Colbert Show” her intention to seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020. With eight declared candidates already, and as many as eight more expected to join the race, the number of Democrats hoping to cash in on President Trump’s unpopularity could well set a record.

But no matter what mask they don, or what “lane” they hope to occupy in the race, these Democrats represent the interests of business and finance, and espouse different versions of anti-working-class politics. Gillibrand is no exception.

One prominent aspect of her campaign is an emphasis on identity politics. She is the second female senator to join the race, following Elizabeth Warren and preceding Kamala Harris. The video on the front page of her campaign website starts with her name being typed into a Google search bar, cutting to her children’s names on her Wikipedia page, followed by “mom” being typed into a new search bar, which brings up photos of her family and her cooking in a kitchen for them.

Answering host Stephen Colbert’s question, Gillibrand spoke of wanting to be the president of the United States because she is a “young mom,” who will “fight for other people’s kids as hard as I would fight for my own.” After making brief and hollow statements of her support for better public education, healthcare, and jobs, Gillibrand stressed that these issues will be impossible to accomplish without “taking on institutional racism” and “taking on the corruption and greed in Washington”—the latter, soon highlighted, being something with which she has first-hand experience.

Gillibrand, who is married to a financial manager and venture capitalist, was born into a family deeply connected in the big business political establishment. Her grandmother, Polly Noonan, was a confidante of Albany’s former Mayor Erastus Corning, who ran one of the most enduring and

corrupt Democratic Party machines in the country. Gillibrand’s father, Doug Rutik, is a well-known conservative lobbyist with strong ties to the Republican Party.

Known for beginning politics as an ardent conservative and only shifting to the left in recent times, Gillibrand started her professional career as a lawyer at the David Polk & Wardwell law firm. There, she became a leading defense attorney for tobacco monopoly Philip Morris during the mid-’90s civil and criminal trials investigating the company’s knowledge of the connection between tobacco smoke and cancer. She played an instrumental role in the major legal work that sought to cover up the company’s conscious censorship of incriminating material.

In the early 2000s, Gillibrand heard Hillary Clinton—who was First Lady at the time—speak at a Democratic National Committee event, which she claims inspired her to run for office. To this day, Gillibrand proudly states that the 2016 candidate of Wall Street and big business is her “greatest role model in politics.”

In 2006, with the backing of both Clintons, Gillibrand successfully ran a right-wing campaign to win a seat in the House of Representatives for New York’s 20th Congressional District (Albany and Schenectady counties). She firmly ran against pro-immigration laws and “sanctuary” cities and advocated for the protection of gun rights, boasting an “A” rating by the National Rifle Association.

She received \$23,000 in campaign contributions in 2006 from Philip Morris, and \$18,000 for her 2008 reelection. She has also received substantial contributions from major Wall Street firms, including Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase & Company. During her 2012 reelection campaign, she was the third highest recipient of donations from the securities and investment sector, reportedly taking in more than \$1.84 million.

In 2009, despite public opposition due to her right-wing

views on immigration and gun control, Gillibrand was appointed US senator by New York Governor David Paterson to fill the vacancy that was left by Hillary Clinton, who left her Senate post to become Obama's secretary of state. Gillibrand has been in office ever since, winning election in 2012 and reelection in 2018.

Gillibrand sits on the powerful Senate Committee on Armed Services, overseeing—and therefore playing a hand in—US imperialist military interventions abroad and military research and development at home. She has supported the funding and supplying of Syrian “rebels.”

In 2017, she supported the Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which sought to criminalize individuals for expressing their First Amendment right of participating in political boycotts against the Israeli government and its settlements.

At the height of the #MeToo movement in late 2017, Gillibrand was the first to call on Senator Al Franken of Minnesota to resign over sexual misconduct allegations before an Ethics Committee investigation was opened. In a “60 Minutes” interview about her stance, she was asked why, as a lawyer who believes in due process, didn't she wait for an investigation to confirm or deny the allegations against Franken. Ignoring the democratic issue of due process, Gillibrand retorted, “It's my choice to speak out.” Gillibrand then denied the interviewer's comment that “it feels like to be accused right now is to be convicted,” stating, “that's not true.”

Gillibrand also vocally denounced Bill Clinton during this period, saying he should have resigned for the Monica Lewinsky scandal, wholly ignoring the ultra-right politics that underlay the Republican impeachment campaign and the Starr investigation, as well as, of course, Clinton's right-wing anti-working-class record in the 1990s.

While recently shifting her political positions on immigration, gun reform and gay rights toward the mainstream Democratic Party “left”—calling her previous views “shameful”—Gillibrand provided no credible explanation for these changes. Nor did she explain how abandoning right-wing views on social questions made her a more credible candidate for the presidency.

The one issue Gillibrand obviously will not shift on is national security. Since her 2020 campaign announcement, Gillibrand frequently asserts the truism that both big-business parties in Washington want strong national security at the border, and a strong military presence abroad: “We all want strong military readiness.” She states that ICE should be abolished only because of a ruined public image, while it should be replaced by new, fully funded enforcement agencies, in other words, ICE with a new name.

These views, which seek to demonstrate her allegiance to the Pentagon and intelligence agencies, are shared by all the

Democratic presidential candidates, including Bernie Sanders if he runs.

To burnish her ‘left’ turn, she has adopted, since entering the Senate, a number of liberal positions, such as Medicare-for-all, which are both totally inadequate and have no chance of being implemented by the parties of Wall Street.

Her embrace of Hillary Clinton, the candidate of Wall Street and the CIA, and Obama, who presided over the largest transfer of wealth in history from the bottom to the top, demonstrate clearly her adherence to the right-wing policies of the Democrats that are responsible for the accelerated deepening of economic and social inequality, paving the way for the Trump presidency.

A New York voter poll conducted by Quinnipiac University following Gillibrand's presidential bid announcement found that the senator is at her lowest ratings for job approval and favorability in nearly a decade. Another recent poll by Quinnipiac University showed that the most important issues for voters across the board were the economy, taxes and healthcare—issues Gillibrand addresses only with platitudes and conventional boilerplate—jobs are good, taxes are bad, healthcare is necessary.

These candidates of the ruling class will never offer up any legitimate answers to the masses of exploited Amazon and other low-wage workers, underpaid and underfunded teachers, laid-off autoworkers, and federal workers facing a new round of furloughs and cuts.

Gillibrand's role, and that of all Democrats, is to confuse and divert workers and young people from the realization that only the revolutionary replacement of capitalism with socialism will put an end to inequality and war. The Democratic presidential primary race is merely an audition to select which among two dozen or so candidates can undertake that task most effectively.



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