

Two incumbent House members defeated in primary voting

Patrick Martin
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America is a land of deepening social crisis and political turmoil, in which the vast majority of the population opposes President Trump and his ultra-right policies and seeks an alternative. But this reality is almost completely obscured by a corporate-controlled two-party system which suppresses and distorts these popular sentiments.

Democratic and Republican primaries in five states on Tuesday, August 4, provided yet another demonstration of this political reality. These states—Michigan, Missouri, Kansas, Arizona and Washington—account for 45 seats in the House of Representatives, about 10 percent of the total, split nearly evenly, 22 Democrats and 23 Republicans.

Only 10 of the 45 seats are considered even remotely competitive, five for each party. In the remaining 35 seats, the party nomination is considered the equivalent of election, as the other capitalist party does not wage a serious campaign, and all other challengers are effectively excluded by the two-party monopoly.

Four incumbent representatives did not seek renomination, either retiring from politics or running for higher office. Two of the remaining 41 were defeated, which passes for a political upheaval in the staid precincts of official American politics: Democrat William Lacy Clay of Missouri and Republican Steve Watkins of Kansas.

Clay had held his seat for 20 years, succeeding his father, William Lacy Clay Sr., who held the seat for 32 years and was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. The First Congressional District of Missouri covers the entire city of St. Louis and its northern suburbs, including the town of Ferguson, where 18-year-old Michael Brown was murdered by a local cop in 2014.

Cori Bush, a nurse and pastor, became active in Black Lives Matter and campaigns against police violence, and came to prominence during the protests against Brown's

murder. She ran against Clay in 2018 with the support of Senator Bernie Sanders and then-candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, but was swamped by Clay's financial and organizational advantages and lost by 20 percentage points.

In 2020, Bush was better financed and supported again by Sanders and the Justice Democrats group, but not by Ocasio-Cortez, who after working with Clay in Congress announced she would remain neutral. In the course of the campaign, Bush played a prominent role in the protests that followed the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. She also contracted coronavirus but recovered.

In the week before the primary, the new prosecutor of St. Louis County, an African-American, announced there would be no charges brought against Darren Wilson, the former Ferguson cop who shot Michael Brown to death, further inflaming popular sentiments over police violence.

Bush defeated Clay by 49 percent to 46 percent, on a turnout that increased slightly from 2018, despite the impact of the pandemic. Bush rolled up a large margin in the city of St. Louis, while Clay won more narrowly in the suburban portion of the district.

While Missouri is considered a "red state" in capitalist politics, having voted for Republican presidential candidates for the past 20 years, with two Republican US senators, a Republican governor and state legislature, voters Tuesday approved an expansion of the Medicaid program that was vehemently opposed by the Republican Party. The referendum to expand Medicaid and incorporate the expansion into the state constitution, making it difficult to overturn or repeal, passed by 53 to 47 percent, with huge margins in St. Louis, Kansas City and their suburbs. Missouri is the sixth Republican-controlled state to expand Medicaid by ballot measure in the past three years. An estimated 200,000 families will be added to the program as a result.

Once Cori Bush enters Congress, a virtual certainty in the heavily Democratic district, she will be considered the fifth member of the “squad,” the group of left-talking, female, minority members which now includes Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley. This group has been used to give the Democratic Party a “left” face, even while policy is set by multi-millionaires like Nancy Pelosi and former military-intelligence operatives like Elissa Slotkin, who are far more numerous and influential.

In Michigan, the most populous of the states holding primaries August 4, Tlaib won renomination easily, defeating Detroit City Council President Brenda Jones. With about 90 percent of the vote, Tlaib had a 2-1 lead, 63,650 to 32,582. Turnout was much heavier than in 2018, when Tlaib defeated Jones by fewer than 1,000 votes in the contest to succeed John Conyers in the westside Detroit seat. The increased turnout was largely due to mail ballots, which were made available by the state on request because of the coronavirus pandemic.

It is notable that Jones had little success with an openly race-based appeal, claiming that the predominately African-American district should be represented by a black congresswoman rather than a Palestinian-American like Tlaib. Jones received nearly the same vote as in 2018, while Tlaib’s vote more than doubled.

While Bernie Sanders and Justice Democrats celebrated the victory, virtually the entire Democratic political establishment also backed Tlaib, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the Michigan AFL-CIO, and the United Auto Workers. She was also backed by the Wayne County Democratic Black Caucus.

In the Grand Rapids-based seat left open by the retirement of Republican Justin Amash, who left the party and supported the impeachment of President Trump, Peter Meijer won the Republican primary. A grandson of the founder of the supermarket chain bearing his name, Meijer is a 32-year-old Army veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, a Republican version of the CIA Democrats who played a major role in the outcome of the 2018 congressional elections.

Statewide, mail-in ballots contributed to a significant increase in turnout. Some 2.1 million voters requested absentee ballots for the primary, four times the total for the 2016 primary, and nearly 1.6 million ballots were returned, more than in the 2016 general election. Both the counting of the mail ballots and the in-person voting—much reduced and conducted on the basis of social distancing—were carried out without significant problems,

according to press reports and state officials.

The other representative defeated for renomination Tuesday, Republican Steve Watkins of the Second Congressional District in Kansas, was effectively removed by his own party establishment because he was viewed as vulnerable due to erratic personal behavior. He has been charged with four counts relating to vote fraud because he gave a UPS store as his home address when he registered to vote last year.

Given the phony claims of vote fraud emanating from the White House and the Trump reelection campaign, having a Republican candidate indicted for vote fraud was a political embarrassment. State Treasurer Jake LaTurner challenged Watkins for renomination and won the primary easily, 49 percent to 34 percent, with a third candidate taking the balance. LaTurner will face the Democratic mayor of Topeka, Michelle De La Isla, for a seat that Watkins won only narrowly in 2018.

Also in Kansas, Representative Roger Marshall won the Republican Senate nomination, defeating the fascistic former state official Kris Kobach, who lost the state’s gubernatorial election in 2018 to Democrat Laura Kelly. The Senate seat, held by the retiring Pat Roberts, has been held by the Republican Party for a century. Marshall will face a well-financed Democratic opponent, Dr. Barbara Bollier, a longtime Republican state legislator who recently switched parties.

One other political event of August 4 was the announcement of final results of a handful of close races from the June 23 primaries in New York state, where the counting of mail-in ballots was delayed by legal challenges. In one of the wealthiest congressional districts, covering the Upper East Side of Manhattan, 14-term incumbent Carolyn Maloney was declared the Democratic winner over challenger Suraj Patel. In the poorest congressional district in America, in the south Bronx, city councilman Ritchie Torres won a 12-way race for the Democratic nomination.

President Trump had repeatedly cited the delay in determining the winner of the Maloney-Patel contest as evidence that mail balloting would lead to months of delay in declaring a winner in the November 3 presidential election.



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