

Media makes mayoral endorsements as Wall Street seeks best candidate to manage New York's crisis

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The New York State primary elections are less than six weeks away, and they include the contest for the Democratic nomination for mayor of New York City. The nominee is virtually guaranteed victory in the general election, which will not take place until November. The first of three debates between the leading candidates in the June 22 primary is expected to include eight of the contenders and is scheduled for tonight.

Leading media outlets and other representatives of the ruling elite, fully conscious of the stakes amid the deepening social and economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, have begun to weigh in on next month's vote. Although every Democrat, including those fraudulently labeled as "left," is fully committed to the capitalist system, the ruling class seeks the most effective defender of its interests. This week the editors of both the *New York Times*, the leading organ of the Democratic Party, and the *New York Post*, the right-wing tabloid owned by Rupert Murdoch, announced their endorsements, and both were somewhat unexpected.

The *Times*, instead of choosing one of the candidates currently leading in the polls, favored Kathryn Garcia, the former city Sanitation Commissioner. The *Post*, which championed Donald Trump throughout his term in office, endorsed Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, one of two black candidates for the nomination.

The crisis in the largest city of the US is laid bare by some statistics: nearly 1 million of its 8 million people have tested positive for the coronavirus, and nearly 33,000 have died. The city's 125 billionaires have reaped enormous dividends, with former mayor Michael Bloomberg increasing his wealth by \$11 billion. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate stands at 11.7 percent, more than three times the pre-pandemic level and far above the national average. Underemployment is 25 percent, one in five residents are officially classified as poor, and nearly half of the city's population is "near-poor."

Instead of focusing on the pandemic, economic suffering and inequality, the media and the candidates have followed the lead of a recent *Times* headline that set the agenda by announcing that crime was "at the center of the NYC mayor's race." After

a shooting in Times Square last Saturday that slightly wounded three passersby, various candidates went to the scene to hold press conferences announcing that public safety was the primary issue. Andrew Yang held a press conference on Sunday morning, and Adams, touting his experience as an ex-cop, appeared twice. Retired banker Ray McGuire also came to offer his support for added policing.

Recent polls have placed Yang, the businessman and former contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, and Adams, the Brooklyn Borough President, in the lead, with Scott Stringer, the two-term City Comptroller during the administration of current mayor Bill de Blasio, not far behind. With more than a dozen candidates, however, the polls are not considered strongly indicative of final results, especially since the primary will be the first conducted under a ranked-choice voting system, in which second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-place choices are redistributed if, as expected, no candidate wins a majority. No candidate has yet scored more than 21 or 22 percent in the polls.

Yang until recently led the surveys, based largely on name recognition as well as the perception within sections of the middle class that he would harken back to the supposed "efficiency" and "pro-business" policies of the three-term billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg. In recent weeks, however, his opponents, as well as media commentary, have targeted his lack of experience in government as well as his close connection with businessman and lobbyist Bradley Tusk, his main consultant. Tusk is a venture capitalist with a distinctly conservative policy background. He has worked in the past both for current Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and for Bloomberg when he was mayor. He ran Bloomberg's campaign for a third term in 2009, when the incumbent used his enormous wealth to twist arms and get a City Council vote extending the mayoral term limit to three terms.

Adams has pointed to his experience as a victim of police brutality as a teenager and to his later 22 years as a police officer in Brooklyn to appeal both to anger against police violence and to right-wing law-and-order sentiment. Adams

switched his party registration to Republican when Rudy Giuliani was mayor in the 1990s, and then ran as a Democrat both for the State Assembly and most recently for the Brooklyn borough presidency.

The candidate has made clear his priorities, and he impressed the Trump backers on the *Post* editorial board, who wrote approvingly that Adams favored weakening the bail reform recently enacted in Albany and also supported the reinstatement of a Police Department anti-drug unit notorious for brutalizing workers and youth, especially black and Hispanic suspects. Adams' support for charter schools, used to weaken the public schools, also appealed to the *Post*. The *Post*'s endorsement was welcomed enthusiastically by Adams, a further indication that he is advertising his credentials for keeping the lid on the class struggle and at the same time unleashing the full force of the police against the working class when that becomes necessary.

The third candidate, Scott Stringer, became the target of a #MeToo-style operation two weeks ago. A former volunteer on an unsuccessful campaign by Stringer from 20 years ago came forward with claims of sexual harassment and assault, which the candidate has strenuously denied. The accuser, Jean Kim, has no contemporaneous corroboration of the long-ago events but claims that Stringer's run for the mayoralty inspired her sudden determination to tell her story.

No other claim has been leveled against Stringer. Even Katha Pollitt, noted middle class feminist and columnist for *The Nation*, headlined her article on the affair this week, "Rushing to Judgment Over Scott Stringer." Meanwhile, however, although refusing to withdraw from the race, Stringer has seen the endorsements rescinded by the Working Families Party and a long list of elected "progressives," including Congressman Jamaal Bowman and other members of the Democratic Socialists of America who hold office as New York State Senators and Assembly members. A thoroughly conventional politician who has nevertheless been anointed as the "left" alternative in the vote, Stringer retains the support of the United Federation of Teachers and of Manhattan Congressman Jerrold Nadler, among others.

Five other candidates have registered single digits in recent polls, including Kathryn Garcia, Diane Morales, Maya Wiley, Shaun Donovan and Ray McGuire. Retired Citigroup banker McGuire stands out from the pack because he has raised millions from his friends on Wall Street, but any hopes that would translate that into popular support are rapidly evaporating. In a recent question-and-answer exchange with journalists, McGuire and Donovan distinguished themselves by guessing that the median house price in the gentrifying borough of Brooklyn was about \$100,000. In fact, it is closer to \$1 million. Donovan, amazingly enough, is a former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, a member of Obama's cabinet!

Ms. Garcia has 14 years of government experience, most recently as the Sanitation Commissioner, but has never been

elected to public office. The *Times*' endorsement lauded her supposed managerial ability and achievements at Sanitation and in earlier posts. The editorial also inevitably nods to identity politics, declaring that Garcia, who is white, "was adopted and grew up in a multiracial family in Brooklyn," and that "she would be the first woman" to become mayor, "but there are many *other* reasons to give her the job." (emphasis added)

There are reasons to doubt that the *Times*' endorsement will translate into votes for Garcia. Readers may recall the newspaper's noteworthy "joint endorsement" of Amy Klobuchar and Elizabeth Warren in the 2020 presidential campaign.

New York City is one part of the US with a relatively high percentage of the workforce that remains unionized. The unions, even more integrated into the Democratic Party in New York than elsewhere, have divided their endorsements among a number of the candidates, demonstrating their major role within the capitalist two-party system that they slavishly defend.

Adams has picked up the most support, including Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union, several Amalgamated Transit Union locals, Transport Workers Union Local 100 (representing bus and subway workers in the city), DC 37 of AFSCME (the umbrella organization enrolling much of the city workforce), and the Hotel and Motel Trades Council. Stringer has been endorsed by the UFT, the Communications Workers, the Building and Construction Trades Council, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers Union, and several others. Wiley was endorsed by Local 1199 of the SEIU, representing about 200,000 hospital and health care workers.

The working class, including most of the membership of the above unions, is, not surprisingly, uninterested and unenthusiastic about a mayoral vote in which they are asked to choose between candidates who all support the status quo, no matter how much they try to disguise that fact. Eight years ago, in the last mayoral primary in which no incumbent was running, about 22 percent of enrolled Democrats went to the polls. There is little reason to expect a significantly greater turnout, although the vote will make use of early voting and mail-in ballots this year.



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