San Francisco DA recalled as Democratic Party shifts further to the right

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Primary elections were held Tuesday in seven US states, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico and South Dakota, to choose the nominees of the Democratic and Republican parties for the general election set for November 8. Turnout was generally light, partly because of the lack of competitive contests but mainly because of widespread popular disaffection with both capitalist parties.

The seven states account for 78 seats in the House of Representatives, nearly one-fifth of the House total. These are currently split 56-22 in favor of the Democrats, who dominate California and New Jersey, by far the largest in this group of states which are otherwise rural and less populated.

The vast majority of the 78 incumbents are running for reelection against only token opposition from the other capitalist party. Even in those seats where the incumbents are retiring, the winner of the primary in the dominant party in that district is expected to win the general election easily.

Of the 78 seats, only one each in New Jersey, Iowa, New Mexico and Montana are considered competitive, along with a handful in California. Of the three Senate contests, in California, South Dakota and Iowa, and four contests for governor, in California, South Dakota, Iowa and New Mexico, none are considered competitive.

The most significant results Tuesday were in two municipal contests in California. San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin was recalled in a special election, by a margin of 60 percent to 40 percent. In Los Angeles, real estate mogul Rick Caruso and Congresswoman Karen Bass finished as the top two candidates in the mayoral primary and will face each other in the November runoff.

Boudin, a left liberal backed by the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party along with its pseudo-left supporters, was first elected in 2019 campaigning against police brutality and excessively long jail terms. He clashed repeatedly with the police unions and real estate and other business groups and became a focal point for a right-wing law-and-order campaign, aimed particularly at whipping up

fears in the Asian community over a sharp rise in anti-Asian violence.

Once enough signatures had been gathered to force a recall, with support from both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party establishment, business interests, including hedge funds and venture capitalists poured in more than $4 million to promote the vote to remove Boudin.

Like the recall of three members of the San Francisco school board earlier this year, right-wing forces took advantage of the political bankruptcy of identity politics with its incessant emphasis on racial divisions. Boudin and his supporters presented police violence as the product solely of racism, concealing the class role of the police as the defenders of capitalist property against the working class.

The complete failure of the Biden administration to improve the conditions of life for working people, to say nothing of the Democratic Party-run state government in Sacramento and the administration of Democratic Mayor London Breed, created widespread popular anger and disgust and indifference to the fate of Boudin.

The result was an election in which there was a sizeable turnout only in the wealthiest areas of the city. Overall voter turnout plunged: from the huge 449,866 anti-Trump vote in 2020, to only 123,926 votes in the recall. Tuesday's vote was only half as large as the 251,032 votes cast in the special election for mayor in 2018 which put London Breed in office.

The vote will be seized on by Democratic politicians to use as a shield against Republican attacks seeking to link the Democrats to the calls to "defund the police" that arose after the 2020 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, which led to massive worldwide protests against police violence.

President Joe Biden already indicated as much, telling reporters Wednesday as he traveled in California to host the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles that the message from the primaries was to spend additional vast sums on the police. "I said, as you recall, we gave the states and all the

localities, billions of dollars, billions of dollars to hire police officers," he said, but "very few have done it."

This included a budget request to Congress for $300 million for hiring and "retraining" police. Biden continued, "It's time they move, it's time the states and the localities spend the money they have to deal with crime as well as retrain police officers, as well as provide for more community policing. It's time they get on with doing that, and that's what I think the message last night from the American public was in all the primaries."

While he did not refer to San Francisco or Boudin in particular, this was clearly the focus of his remarks. And there is little doubt that Vice President Kamala Harris, who started out her political career as San Francisco District Attorney, fervently supported the recall of Boudin behind the scenes.

The other venue for law-and-order politics in the Democratic Party was in Los Angeles, where a half dozen candidates were vying to succeed Mayor Eric Garcetti, who is term-limited. The favorite of the Democratic establishment was Representative Karen Bass, who was on Biden's short list for consideration as vice president in 2020.

But Rick Caruso, a real estate developer and former president of the city's Police Commission, pumped nearly $40 million into an advertising campaign of extraordinary volume. The media campaign backing the hiring of 1,500 more police and an offensive against the homeless boosted him to a narrow lead in Tuesday's primary but well short of a majority. Bass echoed his rhetoric, only proposing to hire somewhat fewer additional police and avoiding the most callous references to the homeless.

Caruso won 41 percent of the vote compared to 38 percent for Bass, but again, the turnout was only 315,763, nearly 20 percent below the last previous mayoral election, despite the date of the election being moved to coincide with the statewide primary in an effort to increase participation. Only one in seven registered voters went to the polls.

The primary contests for Congressional and Senate races, in California and the other six states, included two trends already demonstrated in earlier primaries.

Ex-President Donald Trump had a mixed record in efforts to purge political opponents from the Republican Party. In California, Representative David Valadao finished second to Democrat Rudy Salas in his primary, ahead of a pro-Trump Republican, and will face Salas in November. Valadao was one of 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump for the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

Another Republican congressman who cast a supposedly anti-Trump vote, Michael Guest of Mississippi, was forced into a runoff for the party nomination by a more right-wing opponent who denounced Guest's vote last year to establish a bipartisan commission to investigate the January 6 attack. That resolution passed the House but was blocked by Republicans in the Senate, then superseded by the current investigation by the House Select Committee, which begins public hearings on Thursday night.

On the Democratic side, there were several primary victories by former military-intelligence operatives, of the type the WSWS has spotlighted as "The CIA Democrats."

In the 41st Congressional District of California, one-term incumbent Republican Michelle Steel will face Democrat Jay Chen, a Navy Reserve intelligence officer, in November. Chen finished second in Tuesday's primary, well ahead of any other Democrat.

In California's 3rd Congressional District, which has no incumbent because of redistricting, Dr. Kermit Jones, a former Navy flight surgeon, won the Democratic nomination. Jones was deployed to Iraq with the Marines and was later a White House fellow in the Obama administration advising on medical treatment of military veterans.

In Iowa, retired Admiral Michael Franzen won an upset victory for the Democratic nomination for US Senate, to face seven-term incumbent Republican Charles Grassley, who is heavily favored. Franzen defeated former Democratic Congresswoman Abby Finkenauer, who raised more money and had the support of the party establishment.

In South Dakota—last won by a Democratic presidential candidate in 1964 in the Lyndon Johnson landslide victory over Barry Goldwater—with a Republican governor, a Republican US senator and a Republican member of the House of Representatives all renominated and all expected to win easily in November, voters overwhelmingly rejected a right-wing effort to block the expansion of Medicaid.

A proposed constitutional amendment would have raised the proportion of voters required to pass a state referendum from 50 percent to 60 percent. This was a right-wing effort in the wake of a successful petition drive to put a measure to expand the state's participation in the federal Medicaid program on the fall ballot. The Republican-controlled state government has refused to accept the expansion provided under the Affordable Care Act, even though it is paid for nearly entirely by the federal government.

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