

The cynical politics of the American oligarchy

Democrats promote right-wing extremist candidates in Republican primaries

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Based on electoral considerations of a completely cynical character, the Democratic Party is putting substantial sums of campaign money toward the promotion of right-wing extremist candidates in Republican primaries, on the presumption they will be easier to beat in the general election this November.

The strategy reveals the political bankruptcy and light-minded recklessness of the Democratic Party. They are unable to offer policies and a political record that would actually attract support from the vast majority of voters, working class and middle class. So they aim to make their Republican opponents even more obnoxious, by promoting Republican primary candidates with the most reactionary and repugnant views.

Democratic campaign funds and wealthy individuals have embraced this cynical strategy in a series of primaries in May and June, culminating in the June 28 primaries in Illinois and Colorado, where the Democrats intervened in virtually all the competitive Republican contests, with mixed success. All the Democratic-backed ultra-right candidates lost in Colorado, but all of them won in Illinois.

The Illinois Republican primaries resulted in the nomination of right-wing extremist State Senator Darren Bailey for governor and ultra-right lawyer Thomas DeVore for attorney general. Bailey, an open racist and semi-fascist, supports an initiative that would separate the city of Chicago, which he refers to as a “hellhole,” from the rest of the state of Illinois. DeVore came to prominence opposing COVID-19 mitigations and vaccines, filing lawsuits against statewide and Chicago masking policies and vaccine mandates, defending the “freedom” of parents to send their children maskless to school in the midst of a deadly pandemic. He is also Bailey’s lawyer.

Bailey promotes Trump’s lie of a “stolen election,” opposes abortion rights and masking, and spreads vaccine misinformation from his Facebook campaign page. One of his key campaign workers is Lawrence Ligas, long-time Illinois Republican activist and January 6 coup participant. Ligas was arrested and charged for his actions in the course of occupying the Capitol, after which Bailey’s campaign was forced to issue a perfunctory statement about supporting the law.

Bailey and Representative Mary Miller, a white supremacist and admirer of Adolf Hitler, both enjoyed Donald Trump’s support at a Quincy, Illinois event the weekend before the June 28 primary. The two Democratic incumbents, billionaire Governor J. B. Pritzker and Attorney General Kwame Raoul, would be favored against any Republican opponents, including these two semi-fascists. But Pritzker was leaving nothing to chance, pumping an estimated \$36 million into the Bailey and DeVore campaigns, routed through the Democratic Governors’ Association (DGA).

The Democratic intervention into the Republican gubernatorial primary was literally two-faced, as some of the ads attacked Bailey as “too conservative for Illinois,” in terms calculated to rev up ultra-right Republicans, and others attacked the relatively more moderate candidate, Richard Irvin, former mayor of Aurora and a criminal defense attorney, from a right-wing standpoint.

The DGA ads depicted Irvin, who is African American, as no different from a Democrat, and uncommitted to “law and order.” One ad paid for by the Democrats highlighted Irvin’s career as a criminal defense attorney, homing in on his defense of those accused of sex crimes.

The narrator intones: “Richard Irvin’s real record on crime? For 15 years Irvin has been a defense attorney, profiting by defending some of the most violent and heinous criminals. Domestic abusers and sexual assault, a kidnapper who molested a child, reckless homicide, even accused child pornographers. Richard Irvin has been getting rich by putting criminals back on our streets. Tell Richard Irvin to stop pretending to be tough on crime and start supporting policies that keep people safe.”

When questioned by reporters about his campaign’s involvement in this right-wing filth, Pritzker defended the ads: “It’s important that Democrats be involved in telling the truth out there and when it comes to what the DGA’s doing here in Illinois, they’re simply telling the truth, which is more than the Irvin campaign can say.”

The same strategy was used in the Pennsylvania primary in May. State Senator Douglas Mastriano won the Republican nomination for governor with the assistance of hundreds of

thousands of dollars in ad spending from his future opponent, Democratic state Attorney General Josh Shapiro.

Mastriano is a retired colonel in the US Army and an organizer of the January 6 “Stop the Steal” event during which then President Trump instigated the attack on the US Capitol. Mastriano led the effort in Pennsylvania to discount the popular votes in the 2020 election and award the state’s 20 electoral votes to Trump. In the 2022 primary, he campaigned on expanding gun rights, attacking public education, banning abortion and lowering taxes for the rich.

As in Illinois, the Shapiro campaign’s ad presented Mastriano’s views as “too conservative” for Pennsylvania, aiming to boost his standing with conservatives who make up the bulk of the Republican primary voters. The Democrat’s \$870,000 in television ad money raised Mastriano’s political profile, dwarfing the roughly \$360,000 Mastriano spent for his own TV advertising.

In California, the House Majority political action committee, linked to Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, ran television ads promoting Chris Mathys as “100 percent pro-Trump” and “a true conservative” to encourage far-right voters to give Mathys the edge over incumbent Republican David Valadao, who voted for Trump’s impeachment, in the race for the state’s 22nd congressional district. In Colorado, Democrats put \$2 million toward the nomination of Ron Hanks, also involved in the January 6 coup attempt, in order to try to defeat the more “moderate” Republican Joe O’Dea. In both states, the attempt failed and the more moderate Republican candidates won. Valadao will face Democrat Rudy Salas in November, while O’Dea faces incumbent US Senator Michael Bennet.

Former Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill has been credited with originating this strategy 10 years ago in her 2012 reelection campaign. Ultra-right Representative Todd Akin was trailing in the race for the Republican Senate nomination before McCaskill intervened with large amounts of ad money, helping him edge out two more moderate opponents. She then defeated Akin in the general election, citing particularly his comments on abortion.

McCaskill later told National Public Radio, “This has to be done very carefully.” While it contributed to her reelection in 2012, it did nothing to combat the further shift of the Republican Party towards the fascist right, and in 2018, McCaskill was swept out of office by state Attorney General Josh Hawley, who has gone on to position himself as the most ardent pro-Trump fascist in the US Senate. He was the first Republican senator to declare, in December 2020, that he would support a challenge to Biden electors in the battleground states, a key step in Trump’s plan to use the January 6, 2021 certification vote in Congress as the occasion for his coup attempt.

This experience illustrates the politically reactionary character of this Democratic Party strategy. They not only take

the risk that the more fascistic Republican will win the election in which they are intervening. They actually encourage the further development of the Republican Party in a fascist direction, by not offering any genuine political alternative.

In making an obviously insincere and duplicitous political appeal, the Democrats demonstrate that they take Republican voters for fools, who can be manipulated by any sort of “disinformation,” including that concocted by the Democrats themselves. But the 75 million people who voted for Trump in 2020 were not mere dupes, nor were they all fascists. Many of them have been alienated from the Democratic Party for good reason, because it has become the party of Wall Street, of the military-intelligence apparatus and endless wars, and of privileged sections of the upper-middle class, and cares nothing about the destruction of jobs, living standards and entire communities from corporate deindustrialization.

In pursuing this strategy, the Democrats have issued a tacit but high profile, public admission of their political bankruptcy. Representing a section of the ruling class that harbors no commitment to democratic forms of rule or progressive social policies of any kind, the Democrats do not seek to win elections through any genuine, positive mass appeal.

In the face of crying social need for wage raises, health care, food and housing assistance, access to education, and overwhelming social opposition to the bipartisan record of endless war and austerity, the concomitant explosions of mass violence, they offer *nothing*.

The oligarchic character of American society was perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the Illinois primary, where the two leading Republican candidates were each supported by billionaires representing the contending factions within the Republican Party, and the billionaire Democratic governor of Illinois on the other. AdImpact, an analytics firm, estimated that television advertisement spending in the Illinois primary totaled at least \$100 million.

The Democrats make no genuine appeal to the working class, promise no serious reforms or anything that speaks to the crying needs of a society battered by decades of social counterrevolution and a pandemic. Much more worrisome to them than the rise of fascist candidates and the threat of a violent coup and dictatorship is the prospect of a mass rebellion of working people against the bipartisan policies of austerity, war, and mass death through pandemic.



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