

Pennsylvania House Republicans impeach Philadelphia's Democratic district attorney

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Last Wednesday, the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania House of Representatives voted 107 to 85 to impeach Philadelphia's Democratic District Attorney Larry Krasner. All but one Republican voted for impeachment and all Democrats voted against with the exception of three who were on leave and did not vote.

Krasner, who was reelected last year for a second four-year term as Philadelphia DA by a wide margin, has been a focus of fascistic agitation by Republicans in Pennsylvania and nationally. Donald Trump has singled him out as a prime example of "radical left" Democratic support for crime and criminals.

The anti-democratic and contrived character of the impeachment was underscored by the fact that it was carried out by a lame-duck House following a midterm election that will potentially shift control of the legislative chamber to the Democrats. Final results in two hotly contested suburban Philadelphia districts are expected on November 23, but on Friday the Associated Press said the Democrats had narrowly won at least one of the two and would gain control of the state House for the first time in 12 years.

The state Republicans claim that Krasner's "soft on crime" policies are responsible for an upsurge in gun violence and other crimes in the city. In the Articles of Impeachment, the Republicans list supposed offenses such as "deemphasizing" or "decriminalizing" petty crimes such as theft, prostitution and possession of small quantities of marijuana, and enacting alternative sentencing guidelines for low-level offenders. The Republicans also vilify Krasner for his prosecution of police officers involved in shootings of suspects.

According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the state Senate will begin certain "administrative tasks related to the trial" of Krasner during the lame-duck session and before the new state government assumes office. However, with the present legislative session ending November 30, it is

unlikely that the trial will reach completion before the present state legislature adjourns.

Conviction and removal from office requires a two-thirds vote by the state Senate. The Republicans retained control of the state's upper chamber, but all Republican senators plus at least five Democrats would have to vote for conviction, whether in the current lame-duck session or in the new legislature that convenes in January, an unlikely event in either case.

Stephen Toss, a law professor at Penn State University, explained the uncharted waters into which Pennsylvania politics have entered, telling the *New York Times*, "I am not aware of any precedents where this has happened, where there's a lame duck, after-the-fact call up of impeachment... and it is basically up to the Pennsylvania Senate to decide what the procedural rules are."

Bruce Ledewitz, a Duquesne University professor of constitutional law, told the *Inquirer*, "There is very little likelihood here that there's a legally sufficient basis for impeachment and removal." He noted that the state court system, where the conflict may end up, has the power to stop the impeachment drive or move it forward.

Impeachment, whether it has a factual basis or not, has been rarely used to deal with political opponents. The last person to be impeached and removed in the state was Supreme Court justice Rolf Larsen in 1994. Some 200 years prior to that case, judges were found guilty of misconduct in 1811 and 1803.

The resort to impeachment shows that there has been no lessening of the fierce factional conflict within the capitalist two-party system in the aftermath of the midterm elections. The widely predicted Republican "red wave" failed to materialize, as voters in battleground states such as Pennsylvania defeated most Trump-endorsed election deniers, while evincing little support for their Democratic opponents.

The Democrats retained their narrow control of the US

Senate by flipping one Republican Senate seat, the open seat in Pennsylvania, where Democrat John Fetterman defeated Trump-endorsed Republican Mehmet Oz. The Republicans narrowly ended Democratic control of the House.

The Democrats also retained control of the Pennsylvania governorship, with Attorney General Josh Shapiro defeating Trump-backed election denier Doug Mastriano.

In their impeachment of Krasner, the Republicans have resorted to racist dog whistles, latching on to an uptick in gun-related deaths in Philadelphia. In the lead-up to the midterms, they targeted Philadelphia voting districts in an attempt to invalidate thousands of mail-in ballots on the flimsy grounds that they were improperly dated, despite the fact that they arrived at voting precincts on time.

In cynical remarks, Republican Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff said his party is standing up for “those who do not have a voice.” He continued, “It is saddening and it doesn’t matter what the geography is. It should upset all Pennsylvanians. And that’s what this resolution is about. It says enough is enough.”

Following the November 2020 election, Benninghoff was among several dozen state Republicans who called on their US Senate and House representatives to “object, and vote to sustain such objection, to the Electoral College votes received from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania” in favor of Democratic Presidential candidate Joe Biden.

While Republicans are signaling that their strategy moving forward is to obstruct their political opponents and further assault the remnants of democratic rule in America, the Democratic party bends over to accommodate and offers concessions in the name of “unity.”

Both Governor-Elect Shapiro and incoming US Senator Fetterman are distancing themselves from any sort of “progressive” stance on crime, following the turn of Democrats nationally against calls to “defund the police” and their de facto dropping of demands to rein in police violence.

During the critical prime time, pre-election debate between Fetterman and Oz, the ostensibly “left-wing” Democrat backtracked on holding police accountable as well as on immigrants’ rights. Fetterman promoted his pro-police record at a senior center earlier this month, saying he was “proud to work with our police departments, and funding the police.”

Last Wednesday, Shapiro publicly met with outgoing Democratic Governor Tom Wolf and refused to answer

questions about Krasner’s impeachment, saying, “This is not an issue that comes before the attorney general or the governor.”

While some Philadelphia Democrats have denounced the Republicans’ anti-democratic move, they have allocated still more money to fund the police. In June of this year, the Democratic-dominated Philadelphia City Council unanimously approved a substantial increase in the Philadelphia Police Department’s budget, adding \$30 million annually, bringing total funding to over \$788 million.

A report from 2021 revealed that out of 9,000 civilian complaints against Philadelphia police officers, only 0.5 percent, or about 45 incidents, resulted in anything more than a mere verbal warning.

The growth of violent crime, like all social phenomena, is rooted in the inequality and poverty produced by the capitalist system. Last year, Philadelphia achieved the tragic distinction of having the highest poverty rate of the top 25 most populated cities in the United States. According to the US Census Bureau, Philadelphia currently has a poverty rate of almost 20 percent and a median household income about \$15,000 less than the state average.

The essential features of the Democratic Party’s decades-long rule in cities such as Philadelphia are the growth of poverty and police repression, which the so-called “progressives” such as Krasner continue in a slightly modified form.

In a September interview with the *Atlantic*, Krasner briefly touched on the impact of low funding for social programs such as education before pivoting to gun control as the supposed antidote to crime. “I think a lot of things are driving this. But the main thing I bring up is guns,” he said.



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