D.C. Council Democratic primary elections: Candidates fall all over themselves to promote pro-police policies

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The primary elections for Washington, D.C.'s legislative branch, the Council of the District of Columbia (the D.C. Council), were held June 4 to determine the candidates for the upcoming general election in November. The election campaigns all promoted "law-and-order," as prospective council members prostrated themselves before the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

In spite of a marked decrease in violent crimes in the Washington, D.C. area, down 27 percent from the same time in 2023, and crime overall, down 16 percent, the candidates for D.C. Council seats have run on platforms generally supporting law enforcement or deriding the incumbents as being lax on crime.

The primaries took place three months after the D.C. Council approved the Secure DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2024, passed in the wake of a purported crime wave in the District. The draconian law, which focused on punitive measures to crack down on the District's poor, did nothing to address crime's root social causes. The bill, which passed 12-0, with one "present" vote, was signed into law on March 11.

The rightward shift of the two parties was most starkly captured in the races featuring candidates endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). The Ward 4 election saw Janeese Lewis George win easily against two "law-and-order" candidates in a three-way Democratic primary, garnering 66 percent of the vote.

George, who is a member of the DSA in Washington, D.C. and ran on a campaign of defunding the police in the 2020 council election, was endorsed by her fellow pseudo-leftists. When she was endorsed by the group in February for the 2024 primary, there was not a single mention of the word "police" in their endorsement statement.

George supported the Secure DC crime bill. In addition to imposing more stringent penalties for crimes such as illegal gun possession and retail theft, it also greatly expanded pre-trial detention to include juveniles for many crimes, and lengthened detention to a maximum of 225 days.

At a Ward 4 candidates' forum in April, George reminded her audience of her past work as a prosecutor in the District.

"It wasn't that we were against police officers, it was Black people saying we don't want to be murdered," George said in relation to the high-profile police killings of 2020. "The notion that we're just saying we don't want to be killed and we want to trust our officers does not mean we don't respect and love our officers and support them," she pleaded with her right-wing critics.

She also walked back previous social media postings calling for disinvestment from the police, saying it had reflected nationwide sentiments at the time and she no longer believed the MPD budget should be cut.

George previously was the sole dissenting vote on an emergency crime bill passed last July, modeled after a more draconian package introduced by Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser. The bill temporarily gave police more leeway in pre-trial detention. At the candidates' forum, George sought to critique the initial harsh legislation on technical grounds, stating that it lacked a suitable "ramp-up period."

Despite her opposition to the expanded pre-trial detention, George accepted all other elements of the bill, such as granting prosecutors access to private

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security camera footage and pre-trial ankle monitoring.

That George's record has been deemed by her challengers to be "soft on crime" testifies to the continued rightward path of the Democratic Party as a whole. As the genocide in Gaza continues month after month, and with protests continuing to draw vast support, those who had postured as progressive candidates are doing everything to suppress dissent.

Elsewhere, Trayon White won a narrow majority of votes in a three-way race in Ward 8, the city's most impoverished section. White, in response to a violent crime spike last August in which 16 people had been killed within a few days, had called for the deployment of National Guard soldiers in the District.

The Democrats' law-and-order frenzy echoes the behavior of former President Donald Trump, who in response to the protests spurred on by the George Floyd police murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota in May 2020, called in the National Guard to Washington, D.C. to quell protests. Nine M35 troop carriers and 200 soldiers were deployed, and a curfew was put into effect. The move by Trump was part of a counter-offensive by governments across the US, in which thousands were arrested and one man, David McAtee, was killed by a Kentucky Army National Guard soldier in Louisville.

Other races across the District saw the incumbents prevail in their primary challenges. Brooke Pinto, a "law-and-order" hardliner who had sponsored the Secure DC bill and authored proposed right-wing amendments such as allowing police to collect DNA at the time of arrest, ran unopposed in the Ward 2 Democratic primary.

Wendell Felder, president of the Ward 7 Democrats, who had pledged to "establish a Police Safety Council, enhance law enforcement, and support violence prevention efforts," according to his website, won a ten-way Democratic primary with 22.9 percent of the vote in a battle for the Ward 7 seat held by former mayor Vincent Gray, who decided not to seek re-election due to health and age concerns.

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