

DSA councilmember Nithya Raman enters Los Angeles mayoral race

Marc Wells
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Nithya Raman, a sitting member of the Los Angeles City Council and a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, announced her candidacy for mayor of Los Angeles. Entering the race well into the election cycle, Raman is attempting to position herself as a “change agent” prepared to challenge the city’s political establishment.

Raman declared her candidacy after “growing frustrated” that as a councilmember she could not adequately help constituents with basic issues such as long-delayed streetlight repairs. “I’ve hit up against my limitations as a council member,” she said. To “make sure departments are doing their job” and to meet “the incredible moment of crisis and challenge” facing Los Angeles, she argued, “we need to be doing something differently at the very top.”

She described Los Angeles as “at a breaking point,” asserting that city agencies “can’t seem to manage the basics,” and that residents feel this breakdown “in the most basic ways.” While expressing “deep respect” and “significant alignment” with Mayor Karen Bass, she insisted that major operational changes are needed.

Raman has indicated that her campaign will center on housing and homelessness, government accountability and transparency, and improving public safety. She touts her district’s record of clearing large encampments by “moving people indoors, into housing.”

At the same time, she criticizes the existing system as “very expensive” and lacking “clarity,” “accountability,” and “data and metrics for oversight,” warning that without these the city will “continue to spend money without results.” She links the city’s fiscal management to its inability to perform basic services, arguing that unresolved budget issues are preventing even simple repairs like fixing streetlights.

These themes are crafted to present Raman as an outsider challenging dysfunction. But Raman is not an external critic of city governance; she is an integral part of it. Since taking office in 2020, she has voted for budgets, policing allocations and restructuring measures that have deepened the very crises she now invokes as justification for her

candidacy. The poverty, homelessness and deteriorating public infrastructure afflicting working class Angelenos are the predictable outcome of policies advanced by the Democratic Party establishment, including its self-styled “socialist” wing.

Her entry into the race also comes as other figures associated with the DSA, including Rae Huang, seek to posture as alternatives within the same political framework. The multiplication of nominally “socialist” candidacies reflects the Democratic Party’s effort to provide multiple outlets through which opposition can be channeled back into safe, electoral forms.

The political significance of Raman’s campaign lies in the anxieties gripping sections of the ruling elite. Mayor Bass’s record was marked by expanded police funding, intensified encampment sweeps and anti-worker measures, including the firing of city employees under the banner of fiscal responsibility, generating widespread discontent.

Bass’s handling of January’s wildfires further fueled public outrage, coming on the heels of budget cuts to the fire department and the failure to fill critical vacancies, which left the city ill-prepared to confront escalating climate-driven emergencies. In public addresses, Bass has combined language about compassion with law-and-order initiatives and budgetary austerity.

Significantly, Raman voted in favor of most reactionary measures spearheaded by Bass, such as the declaration of “fiscal emergency” last summer, passed unanimously by the city council, that prepared the destruction of hundreds of jobs.

Under conditions of extreme inequality, the ruling class fears that anger over housing costs, homelessness, low wages and decaying social services is erupting outside the carefully managed channels of official politics. Raman’s candidacy serves to construct a “left” safety valve within the Democratic Party, absorbing opposition while preventing it from developing into an independent movement of the working class.

Experience elsewhere underscores this dynamic. In New

York, DSA member Zohran Mamdani entered office proclaiming progressive credentials. Yet almost immediately after being elected mayor, Mamdani declared his intention to pursue a “partnership” with President Donald Trump, signaling his willingness to collaborate with the very billionaires he had ostensibly opposed.

Raman’s own record underscores the hollowness of her claims. Though often described as a champion of tenants and unhoused residents, she supported the restructuring of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), a move that opens the door wider to private contractors and funnels public funds into corporate hands. The measure, backed by all DSA-aligned councilmembers, further entrenched the model of outsourcing social services to nonprofit and for-profit entities with minimal democratic oversight.

As a councilmember, she initially backed Measure ULA, the “mansion tax,” which taxed high-value property sales to fund affordable housing and tenant programs. Yet she soon pivoted, leading efforts to carve out exemptions for new multifamily and commercial projects. Claiming the tax slowed housing construction, she moved with Mayor Bass to appease developers, even as critics warned the changes could strip over \$100 million from the very programs the measure was meant to support, an unmistakable signal of her alignment with real estate interests over social need.

Raman’s stance on Israel and Palestine provoked disgust, including an intense crisis within the DSA itself. She pursued and accepted an endorsement from “Democrats for Israel – Los Angeles,” leading to her censure by the organization she nominally represents. While presenting herself as a progressive, Raman aligned with a pro-Zionist formation tied to the foreign policy consensus of the Democratic Party establishment.

Raman represents some of the city’s affluent districts. Her appeals to renters and working families are framed in technocratic language about metrics, efficiency and oversight rather than in any challenge to real estate speculation or corporate power. Despite branding herself as a reformer, she has consistently operated within pro-corporate parameters, promoting public-private partnerships and incremental adjustments instead of structural change.

The response from Yvonne Wheeler, president of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, which denounced Raman as a “political opportunist,” exposed the union bureaucracy’s fears that even a nominally “socialist” campaign could draw attention to the city’s underlying class divisions, its juxtaposition of tent encampments and luxury towers, of stagnant wages and concentrated wealth.

Los Angeles epitomizes contemporary American inequality. Entire neighborhoods are wracked by

homelessness and precarious employment, while a thin stratum of 56 billionaires and 516 centimillionaires exerts decisive influence over municipal policy. Between 2014 and 2024, Los Angeles, now the fifth-wealthiest city in the world, saw its millionaire population grow by 35 percent.

The union apparatus, far from organizing a struggle against this order, functions as a partner within it. Its leaders negotiate concessions, police worker dissent and channel discontent back into Democratic Party campaigns.

Ongoing labor struggles across California underscore the fragility of this arrangement. Nurses, teachers, retail workers and graduate students have all mounted significant actions over wages, staffing and working conditions. A growing awareness of collective power threatens to extend beyond the cautious confines imposed by union officials. The denunciation of Raman is bound up with fears that political discontent could converge with industrial militancy.

Other DSA-affiliated officials reinforce this dynamic. Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martínez, frequently cited as part of the city’s progressive bloc, has functioned as a loyal ally of Bass, backing budgets and policing measures. The so-called left wing of the council operates as a loyal flank, providing progressive cover for policies fundamentally aligned with business interests.

Raman’s campaign thus emerges at a moment of mounting instability. By presenting herself as both aligned with Bass and distinct from her, she attempts to straddle a widening divide. She invokes crisis and dysfunction while avoiding any critique of the capitalist framework that produces them. She emphasizes managerial competence to reduce systemic social breakdown to administrative failure.

But the real crisis confronting Los Angeles is not one of bureaucratic inefficiency. It is rooted in a social order that subordinates housing, healthcare and public services to profit. No rearrangement of city management, no rebranding of Democratic Party leadership and no proliferation of DSA-aligned candidacies can resolve the contradiction between immense private wealth and mass deprivation.

The working class does not require a new “change agent” within the same political machinery. It requires an independent political movement, grounded in genuine socialist principles, that rejects the subordination of social needs to market imperatives. The emergence of such a movement is precisely what sections of the ruling class and their allies in the union bureaucracy seek to forestall.



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