

Law-and-order frenzy dominates final weeks of D.C. mayoral primary campaign

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The final weeks of Washington D.C.’s Democratic Party mayoral primary campaign have increasingly come to focus on tough-on-crime themes and a sweeping crackdown on youth, as a concerted establishment effort has been made to center the debate on how best to implement the law-and-order policies demanded by big business.

On May 5, the D.C. Council voted 8–5 to pass a permanent youth curfew law prohibiting those under 18 from remaining in any public place in the District at night. The law empowers the Metropolitan Police Department to declare “extended juvenile curfew zones” on weekends, barring gatherings of nine or more after 8 p.m.

The legislation was introduced to nominally address the phenomenon of so-called “teen takeovers”—large gatherings of young people in commercial and public spaces that officials and media have characterized as inherently threatening to public order and business interests.

The permanent curfew law supplements a similar temporary measure imposed in June of last year by Mayor Muriel Bowser with support from Ward 2 Councilmember and Judiciary Committee Chair Brooke Pinto. Both are Democrats. That temporary curfew expired on April 15, prompting a series of stopgap measures before the Council passed the permanent legislation on May 5.

Democratic Party officials have dangled the threat of an indefinite extension of the federal military occupation of the city that began last year—ordered by the Trump administration and congressional Republicans—as the consequence of inaction on crime, in effect adopting the law-and-order agenda of fascist Republicans themselves. The capitulation has not satisfied the administration. On May 14, U.S. Attorney

Jeanine Pirro announced at a “DC Safe and Beautiful Task Force” press event that she would “aggressively prosecute” the parents of any minor who violates the curfew.

Also appearing at the press event, U.S. Marshals Director Gadyaces Serralta sought to connect the youth gatherings to drug-related crime, saying: “It is about time drug dealers be treated like terrorists, since they are terrorizing our nation and D.C. streets.” At a separate venue, Navy Yard Commissioner Edward Daniels referred to the teen gatherings themselves as “young terrorism”—raising the specter of the federal government targeting teenagers in the streets of the capital city.

Such is the moral and intellectual depravity of the ruling class and its politicians. Washington D.C. is one of the most economically unequal cities in the country. In the shadow of the Capitol, where lawmakers authorize trillions for military spending, illegal wars, genocide, and corporate tax relief, nearly one in three children lives in poverty.

The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute reported in February that 28.8 percent of all children in D.C.—and 45.8 percent of all black children in the District—were below the poverty line in 2024. A December 2024 report from the same group found that the top 20 percent of earners (\$237,281 and above) held 54.1 percent of the city’s wealth, while the bottom 40 percent (\$82,575 and below) held just 9.6 percent; the bottom 20 percent held only 1.9 percent.

Gentrification has torn through working class neighborhoods for decades. The Navy Yard itself—now home to condominiums, chain restaurants, and a baseball stadium—was built on the displacement of predominantly black working class communities. The political establishment, without an ounce of shame,

now denounces the children and grandchildren of those displaced as “terrorists,” treating them as an inconvenience in spaces remade entirely for upper-middle-class consumption.

Since the tens of thousands of layoffs imposed on government agencies by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, these conditions have grown steadily worse. Food insecurity has risen; food banks, themselves hit by Trump’s cuts, struggle to meet the surging demand. Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill,” which offered tax cuts to the financial elite, comes at the cost of SNAP benefits and Medicaid for tens of thousands in the D.C. area. Bowser’s own “Grow DC” budget, drafted to address a projected billion-dollar shortfall, tightens Medicaid eligibility, reduces Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits and eliminates cost-of-living increases until 2030.

The tough-on-crime hysteria has swept through the final stretch of the D.C. Democratic mayoral primary campaign, which concludes on June 16. In a televised debate at Georgetown University on May 19, former at-large councilmember Kenyan McDuffie—a former prosecutor who has made “public safety” the centerpiece of his campaign—used the occasion to position himself as a strongman. When asked about affordability priorities, he pivoted immediately to a call for “top quality” leadership at the Metropolitan Police Department and a crackdown on “teen takeovers.”

Ward 4 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George, a member of the Metro DC chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, offered a surface contrast: expanded youth programs, summer employment and the leveraging of unions and apprenticeships to create jobs. These proposals sat squarely within the standard framework of Democratic Party liberalism, and Lewis George was notably unable to explain where the funding for any of them would come from—a vacuousness that has been a feature of her candidacy since she announced last year.

When candidates were asked what they would do if the Trump administration cut off federal funding in retaliation for non-cooperation with ICE deployments in the city, the limits of George’s program were fully exposed. All she could offer were promises to use “our legal tools,” “build ... relationships in Congress,” and conduct “a forensic analysis of all of our agencies and

try to find savings, starting with health...”

George’s campaign follows a now-familiar pattern. In New York City, DSA member and Democratic Mayor Zohran Mamdani campaigned on promises of free bus service, universal pre-K access, and affordability relief for working class renters. The WSWS warned at the time that Mamdani’s program, however radical its packaging, offered no path forward for workers because it refused to challenge the fundamental power of capital. That assessment has been confirmed. As the WSWS reported in April, Mamdani’s first hundred days in office “have been marked by continuous capitulation before Wall Street and the capitalist state.” Free bus service was abandoned. Promises of pre-school access evaporated. His administration even moved to cut rental vouchers for the homeless while grandstanding before state legislators about taxing the rich.

Workers in the D.C. area would do well to study Mamdani’s record—and to recognize that the same outcome is being prepared in their own city.

The DSA is a pressure group operating entirely within the confines of bourgeois politics. Whatever the intentions of its individual members, its function is to channel working class and youth opposition back into the Democratic Party and thereby neutralize it. The promises of youth employment and expanded social programs will collide—as they always do—with the demands of the bond markets, the real estate lobby, and, in the case of Washington, D.C., the White House and Congress.

The threats leveled against youth and their families reflect a broader bipartisan consensus: the capitalist class has no solution to the crisis it has created and is therefore determined to suppress its symptoms by force. Curfews, parental liability laws, FBI surveillance of teenagers—these are the instruments of a ruling class whose only answer to social devastation is repression.



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