

Platner wins Democratic Senate primary in Maine

Jacob Crosse, Barry Grey
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Graham Platner won the Democratic Senate primary in Maine on Tuesday, setting up a general election campaign against Republican incumbent Susan Collins. His campaign is seen by both parties as the best chance the Democrats have to wrest control of the Senate from the Republicans.

Platner defeated a field that had been all but cleared for him. The Associated Press called the race almost immediately. Platner cleared 50 percent and led with roughly 75 percent of the vote in the early count, against 19 percent for Governor Janet Mills, whose name remained on the ballot even though she had abandoned the race in April.

Platner's victory came despite a #MeToo-style campaign launched against him in the final days by Republican operatives, former campaign staffers and some establishment Democrats.

The contest was over months before primary day. Mills—the candidate Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer had personally recruited and endorsed in October as the establishment favorite—dropped out in April citing fundraising troubles, after polls showed her trailing Platner by as much as 38 points.

By late May, Platner led the entire field, Collins included, in fundraising, having raised \$16.3 million for the cycle. Polls now show him leading Collins in the general election by between 5 and 9 points.

The vote for Platner expresses popular opposition to inequality, to which Platner's rhetoric speaks. Platner's promoters—large sections of the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus, most avidly its so-called “progressive” wing—present him as a genuine representative of the working class. He is nothing of the sort.

A former Marine and Blackwater mercenary who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and gave himself a Nazi Totenkopf tattoo, Platner is a self-declared defender of capitalism and loyal operative of the Democratic Party. In his campaign he has struck a populist pose, appealing to the mass anger against inequality, poverty, war and Trump's drive to dictatorship.

The campaign has been built around talking points largely

borrowed from Bernie Sanders denouncing the dictatorship of billionaires. This finds a response among broad layers of workers and youth, which is what sections of the ruling class, Democratic and Republican alike, find alarming. However phony Platner's anti-oligarch populism, they fear that such rhetoric could encourage an oppositional movement from below that escapes the control of the two big business parties.

Platner enlisted in the Marines and deployed twice to Iraq. He later deployed to Croatia, where he says he received the Totenkopf tattoo. In 2018, by his own account, he worked for Constellis, the renamed Blackwater, the mercenary contractor infamous for its role in the Iraq War and the Nisour Square massacre.

Jacobin's David Sirota presents this as a blue-collar résumé. Sirota wrote that Platner “volunteered to risk his life for his country in combat—multiple times,” and that “these decisions reflect a form of character and courage.” It is the opposite: the profile of a man whose adult life was spent in the armed apparatus of the capitalist state.

His politics are entirely compatible with the Democratic Party. He invokes the New Deal, praises Roosevelt and talks about billionaires, while accepting the framework of capitalism, private property, imperialism and the nation-state. On immigration, he criticizes Trump's methods while accepting the need for border enforcement and a more “effective” system. On war, his military record and later mercenary work speak louder than any carefully scripted antiwar phrase.

This was underscored last Tuesday when Platner traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with Senate Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Schumer. Following the meeting, Schumer repeatedly ducked questions about Platner, saying only that Democrats were going to beat Susan Collins and take back the Senate. In the end, however, he said he endorsed Platner's campaign.

Platner has tried to have it both ways, saying he “spoke with Senator Schumer” and is happy to find “common ground” to defeat Collins, while insisting he will not vote for

Schumer to remain Senate minority leader and will not soften his “criticisms of the party.” But one cannot be a champion of the working class and simultaneously receive the blessing of the “senator from Wall Street,” one of the most fervent defenders of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The #MeToo-style campaign against Platner must be understood within this broader political framework. It is necessary to identify the political function of this scandal and the fraud of both camps.

The controversy began in earnest on May 30, when the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Platner’s wife, Amy Gertner, had told his campaign that she had found sexually explicit text messages to other women on his phone. Gertner and Platner have stated that they went through counseling and that the matter is private.

This was followed on June 4 by a *New York Times* article based on interviews with several women who had dated Platner. The article described what it called “unsettling” behavior, though nothing described in the piece amounts to a crime. The most significant allegations come from Lyndsey Fife, a pro-Zionist Republican operative who worked on Nikki Haley’s presidential campaign and has been paid by the Independent Women’s Forum, a right-wing organization that backed the elevation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court when he himself was the target of sexual assault allegations.

Platner has issued varying responses. He has categorically denied allegations of physical abuse and claimed that when he put the Totenkopf tattoo on his chest he did not know it was a Nazi symbol. At the same time, he has acknowledged that after several military deployments on behalf of US imperialism he went through a “dark period” in which he abused alcohol and acted in ways he now says he regrets.

The hypocrisy of the Republican attacks is staggering. Republicans have seized on Platner’s alleged infidelity and womanizing, presenting themselves as guardians of moral decency. These are the same forces that worship at the altar of Donald Trump, who has faced numerous allegations of sexual misconduct and was found civilly liable for sexually abusing and defaming E. Jean Carroll.

At the same time, the response of Platner’s pseudo-left supporters is no less revealing. Many of the same forces who previously insisted that “believe all women” was a sacrosanct political principle have discarded it overnight, recasting his alcoholism, womanizing and evasions as marks of his working class bona fides.

This is a contemptible caricature of the working class, which is not composed of drunken liars and men who “accidentally” tattoo Nazi insignia on their chests. The #MeToo campaign was always, as the *World Socialist Web Site* explained from its 2017 origins, a reactionary movement

of privileged upper-middle class layers, hostile to due process and the presumption of innocence and indifferent to class. It was deployed in 2020 to drown class anger in the politics of gender and race. The pseudo-left embraced it then and discards it now. Platner is their candidate, their project, their chosen instrument for corralling opposition to capitalism back into the Democratic Party.

Bernie Sanders has defended Platner. Pressed by CNN’s Manu Raju on June 2, Sanders asked, “Why do the richest people in this country want to defeat Graham Platner? That should tell you everything you need to know.” Speaking at the National Press Club on June 8, Sanders again made clear that he would do everything he could to make Platner the next senator from Maine.

Platner is not a threat to the financial oligarchy. His campaign is an operation of the Democratic Party, prepared by operatives, consultants and the trade union bureaucracy. As *Politico* reported in December, Platner was not some spontaneous expression of working class anger. He was recruited by operatives Daniel Moraff and Leanne Fan, veterans of the Sanders milieu, who had previously sought a “blue collar” candidate in Maine before turning to Platner. They were directed to him by union officials, community organizers and “progressive” networks.

Platner’s trajectory is familiar. John Fetterman was sold as a working class outsider because he wore hoodies and shorts. In office, he has emerged as an open defender of Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Platner is simply the Maine version of the same operation.

Workers and youth must draw the necessary conclusion. The fight against capitalism will not be waged through the Democratic Party or its pseudo-left apologists. The fight to expropriate the billionaires, end imperialist war and hold the fascists accountable requires the independent political mobilization of the working class, in the United States and internationally, on the basis of a socialist program.



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