

Self-described socialist N’Kiyla Jasmine Thomas wins Oklahoma Democratic Senate primary

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19 October 2026

In August, N’Kiyla Jasmine Thomas, a 31-year-old Oklahoma nurse with no prior political office, won the Democratic nomination for the US Senate seat vacated by Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, defeating lawyer Jim Priest with 61.2 percent of the runoff vote, or 79,229 votes.

Thomas identifies as a democratic socialist but is neither a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) nor endorsed by the organization. She says she agrees with most of its platform and may join in the future. Her victory nevertheless forms part of a broader pattern of support for candidates campaigning as socialists, including this year’s DSA-backed primary victories in Denver, Washington D.C. and New York. A *Washington Post*–Ipsos poll conducted in July found that 39 percent of US adults, including 46 percent of those under 30, would consider voting for a presidential candidate who identifies as a democratic socialist.

Thomas’s primary victory in Oklahoma, long treated as an impregnable Republican stronghold, is another indication that growing interest in socialism extends well beyond a handful of coastal cities. It reflects a broader process of radicalization driven by inequality, unaffordable housing and disgust with both capitalist parties.

Thomas won without the support of the leading figures in the state’s Democratic establishment. Federal Election Commission filings show that Thomas raised \$57,159 through August 5 and ended the reporting period with \$456 cash on hand. Priest raised more \$370,000 and had the backing of former Democratic governors Brad Henry and David Walters and former Attorney General Drew Edmondson.

She now faces Republican Rep. Kevin Hern, who has

Trump’s endorsement and whose Senate campaign reported nearly \$10 million in receipts through June, in a state that has not sent a Democrat to the Senate since 1990. An August 3–6 poll by Cole Hargrave Snodgrass & Associates, conducted before the Democratic runoff, put Hern at 49 percent and Thomas at 25 percent.

Thomas’ platform calls for pilot programs for a 32-hour workweek without loss of pay, a federal “Credit Renewal Act” to reset consumer credit every five years and forgive older debts under specified conditions, universal affordable childcare and Medicare for all. These proposals address the immense pressures of overwork, debt and deteriorating living conditions confronting workers. But her “democratic socialism” amounts at most to liberal reformism. It proposes measures within capitalism, without challenging capitalist ownership or the class power on which it rests. It has nothing to do with the working class taking power, expropriating the financial oligarchy and abolishing private ownership of the major means of production.

But none of these reforms, no matter how meager, can be won within the framework of the Democratic Party. For half a century, Democratic and Republican administrations alike have dismantled past social gains, attacked workers’ living standards and transferred an ever greater share of society’s wealth to the financial oligarchy and the military.

The Biden administration presided over annual military budgets approaching \$1 trillion and supplied Israel with weapons throughout the Gaza genocide, while temporary pandemic-era social supports were dismantled. The Congressional Budget Office projected \$1.04 trillion in net federal interest payments for fiscal

2026, while actual defense spending for that fiscal year reached \$917 billion. The Trump administration has requested \$1.5 trillion in military funding for fiscal 2027.

Even the limited social measures Thomas advances would therefore require a mass movement of the working class challenging the existing distribution of wealth and power, not a change in the congressional arithmetic within the Democratic Party.

On immigration, she calls for “ending ICE as it currently operates.” This qualified demand does not amount to a call for dismantling the federal deportation apparatus. She also defended maintaining the military and police in her interview with *OU Daily*, invoking the need for law and order.

Thomas built part of her campaign on rejecting American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) money. At a debate she said of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: “He is committing genocide. He is absolutely murdering children. We have to stop providing funding for these wars.”

But her focus on Netanyahu echoes the efforts of Bernie Sanders and other Democrats to reduce the genocide to the policies of one leader. Netanyahu represents the interests of the Zionist state, which functions as an attack dog for US imperialism in the Middle East. The genocide has depended on the weapons, financing and diplomatic protection supplied by Democratic and Republican administrations alike. In a written statement to the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Thomas nevertheless affirmed her commitment to a two-state solution, declaring that “both Israelis and Palestinians deserve the opportunity to live in peace, security and self-determination.” This bankrupt perspective offers Palestinians, at most, an unviable statelet subordinated to the Zionist state and imperialism.

While Thomas is not a member of the DSA, the class role and function of her campaign is the same. The DSA is a middle-class organization within the Democratic Party being deployed to capture and divert the growing movement to the left among workers and young people back into capitalist politics.

The DSA in power has proven to be a staunch defender of capitalism. Within months of taking office, DSA member and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani moved against strikes by nurses and rail

workers, abandoned campaign pledges, left the multibillion-dollar police budget intact and retained Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch. In July, he reversed his campaign pledge to support a \$10,000 bonus for school paraprofessionals, whose starting annual pay was just \$33,222, invoking the anti-worker Taylor Law to oppose the measure. He has repeatedly met with Trump, including hosting him at Gracie Mansion during the UN General Assembly the day before Trump threatened to “annihilate” Iran.

Mamdani campaigned on arresting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu under the International Criminal Court warrant. Instead, his police arrested more than 100 anti-Netanyahu demonstrators outside the United Nations. Among those arrested were DSA elected officials.

What Oklahoma’s result registers is the growing interest in socialism among workers and young people, rather than a victory for socialism itself. This movement to the left is finding an initial expression in support for the DSA and candidates such as Thomas. But the demands driving it bring workers into conflict with these politicians’ defense of capitalism and the Democratic Party.

The decisive issue is the political independence of the working class from the Democratic and Republican parties and the organizations that bind workers to them. This requires the independent organization and mobilization of workers to expropriate the financial oligarchy, take political power and reorganize society on socialist foundations.



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