Seattle’s “socialist” mayor Katie Wilson’s 2027 budget proposes to cut $65 million from housing programs and boost funding to police by $68 million

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Seattle’s Democratic Party mayor Katie Wilson, who describes herself as a “democratic socialist,” has proposed a 2027 budget that slashes $65 million from the Office of Housing and increases funding for the Seattle Police Department by $68 million. The City Council is scheduled to vote on the budget on November 20.

The entire budget is focused around closing a projected $175 million deficit entirely through cuts. In addition to slashing funding geared toward aiding the homeless and providing affordable housing, Wilson’s budget also cuts $7.1 million from the fire department’s overtime fund.

A memo from Seattle Fire Chief Harold Scoggins referenced by the *Chronicle* notes that the reduced overtime will mean minimum staffing for the department will drop from 222 to 209. Scoggins said, “Depending on staffing levels, four to six units may be taken out of service daily to meet this reduction.”

Firefighters turned out in protest at the council’s first budget hearing on October 6, along with several hundred other people all opposed to the cuts. Firefighter Jeff Miller made clear that the department, “gives people a second chance at life,” and that cuts will inevitably slow response times. Other municipal workers testified against cuts that are slated to eliminate almost 150 positions instead of filling them, including workers involved in building inspections and public health and safety.

If approved, Wilson’s budget will only worsen Seattle’s homelessness crisis. The 2026 Point-in-Time Count found 18,365 people homeless in King County, a 9 percent increase from 2024. Unsheltered homelessness rose 21 percent, in part because the region lost 689 shelter beds between 2025 and 2026. Wilson campaigned on opening 4,000 shelter beds in her first term. She revised that downward to 500 beds before the World Cup and missed even that target by more than 300.

The rent for an average two-bedroom apartment in the city has risen to around $2,501 per month, up 31 percent since 2021. For lower-income service and retail workers, one unanticipated medical or other living expense would result in eviction.

Matters have been made worse by the Trump administration moves to restrict federal funding grants for subsidized housing as the Department of Housing and Urban Development stresses “self-reliance.” Seattle and King County currently rely on about $67 million annually in federal funding through HUD’s Continuum of Care program. As much as $22 million could be eliminated by HUD’s new funding rules, county officials warned in July.

Though she is not officially a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Wilson is demonstrating the type of savage austerity workers and young people can expect after the midterm elections from the Democratic Party, including its so-called “progressive wing.” This includes New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Los Angeles Mayor-elect Nithya Raman and Washington D.C. Mayor-elect Janeese Lewis George, all three of whom are members of the DSA. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, a former teachers union lobbyist backed by the DSA, is preparing similar austerity measures.

In one of her first major statements as mayor, Wilson affirmed her willingness to work with the fascist president Donald Trump. In an interview with the *Seattle Times*, she declared, “I’ll meet with anyone.” She continued, “I mean, he’s the president of the United States.” Her position is the same as that of Mayor Mamdani, who has met with the fascistic president three times, insisting this would be good for New York City. In August, Mamdani removed Haitian city employees, who lost their work authorization following the termination of Temporary Protected Status, allowing them to be attacked by Trump’s immigration Gestapo.

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In Chicago, Johnson faces deficits of more than $1.5 billion and plans for cuts. Raman has positively invoked the infamously racist LAPD Chief Daryl Gates, the chief from 1978 to 1992 who once said, “blacks might be more likely to die from chokeholds because their arteries do not open as fast as they do in ‘normal people.’”

The real orientation of Wilson’s policies is made clear by the favorable response of Seattle’s largest corporations, including Amazon, Microsoft and Google. One of the main aspects of the budget is a lack of any new taxes on either corporations or the wealthy, despite the fact that Wilson said she would introduce “progressive taxes” to “raise revenue from the wealthiest households and corporations.”

Wilson has also maintained indirect ties to the city’s billionaires. The Downtown Seattle Association’s president, Jon Scholes, sat on her transition team. Her deputy mayor, Brian Surratt, negotiated with Jeff Bezos over the Climate Pledge Arena. And she kept Shon Barnes as police chief, who promoted a senior officer who had driven into protesters assembled on a sidewalk and covered up the harassment of a trans woman.

For their part, other members of the City Council have argued that the cuts do not go far enough and that the police would still be too understaffed. Bob Kettle demanded that the budget allow for 1,400 officers, up from a proposed 1,250, and which itself is much higher than the current 1,100. Rob Saka dropped a copy of the budget book on the dais to protest the absence of surveillance cameras at Seattle Center. Maritza Rivera asked for a “focused deterrence” program. All three are Democrats.

On November 6, Kelly Kinnison resigned as chief executive of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, the fifth person to hold the job since the agency was created in 2019. A forensic audit found a negative cash balance of $44.7 million and $13 million in expenses the agency could not account for. The *Seattle Times* reported that the agency is now believed to have spent nearly $17 million on administrative costs it cannot recover. In July, Wilson and King County Executive Girmay Zahilay announced that they would take back more than 400 contracts worth about $160 million. Responsibility for the crisis now rests largely with Wilson’s administration, which is shifting money out of housing.

Kshama Sawant and her organization, Workers Strike Back, have criticized Wilson’s budget, calling it an “historic attack on working and poor people.” Sawant called it a “shocking betrayal, especially after Wilson ran as a self-described socialist against openly corporate, pro-cop Mayor Bruce Harrell in the 2025 election.”

Sawant, a former member of Socialist Alternative and the DSA, sat on Seattle’s City Council from 2014-23, and repeatedly boasted about her alliances with “progressive” Democrats, including Wilson. During her time in office, homelessness grew from 10,688 in 2016 to 13,368 in 2022.

In 2017, Sawant and Wilson campaigned in the same coalition to “Trump-Proof Seattle” with a proposed income tax. The initiative fell apart when the income tax was overturned by the King County Superior Court. Sawant’s current initiatives are similar, focused on “taxing the rich.”

The careers of both Sawant and Wilson have been focused on proposing plans to “tax the rich,” not abolishing capitalism. Both promote the pseudo-left politics of the affluent layers of the middle class and are hostile to the fight for the political independence of the working class from both corporate-controlled parties and the fight for workers power and the expropriation of the oligarchy. Whatever periodic references they have made to the working class have been aimed at promoting the trade union bureaucracies whose chief purpose is to suppress the class struggle and subordinate workers to the Democratic Party and the capitalist system it defends.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the anger of millions of people at the wars in Iran and Ukraine, the skyrocketing inflation, attacks on democratic rights and the lurch toward dictatorship by the American ruling elite will not be resolved through elections or changes in the policy of this or that bourgeois politician. Firefighters, city workers, tech workers, aerospace workers and more need their own organizations of class struggle. This means building rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the union apparatus and both capitalist parties, linked through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to fight for what workers need rather than what the city budget says is affordable.

That fight requires a struggle for genuine socialism, including the transformation of Amazon, Microsoft, Boeing and the giant banks into public utilities under the democratic control of the working class. That is the program of the Socialist Equality Party.

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