

Democratic National Committee convenes to pick a new leader

By Niles Niemuth
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The 447 members of the Democratic National Committee are gathering this weekend in Atlanta, Georgia to pick the next leader of the Democratic Party's official governing body.

Following Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election the Democrats have been debating how best to appeal to those who voted for Trump in the next round of elections as they choose a new DNC leader. The discussion has been almost entirely technical and mechanical, paying more attention to rural areas or Appalachia or the Midwest.

The candidates all act as though the mass alienation from the Democratic Party among working people had nothing to do with its embrace of right-wing anti-working class policies: attacks on public education, savage budget cuts at the local, state and federal level, cover-up for police violence, promotion of militarism and war. They have nothing to say about the fact that Obama's was the first US administration to be at war every day for eight years.

What mainly concerns the Democrats, as loyal political servants of big business, is how to head off and derail the social opposition which has erupted in nearly daily protests against the Trump Administrations reactionary policies and at raucous congressional town hall meetings across the country. For that reason, all the candidates have postured as "left" opponents of the Trump administration, claiming to advocate intransigent resistance even while the Democrats in Congress prepare to collaborate with the new administration.

All of the candidates embrace the anti-Russian campaign being waged by sections of the military-intelligence apparatus, with the backing of congressional Democrats, some congressional Republicans, and the bulk of the corporate media,

portraying Trump as the puppet of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The political purpose of this campaign is to hijack the popular opposition to Trump and turn it in a reactionary, pro-war direction.

The next chairperson of the DNC will be responsible for raising money for Democratic election campaigns as well as overseeing the party's presidential primary process. The previous chairperson, Florida Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz, resigned after emails showed that the DNC had intervened in the 2016 primaries to assist Clinton against her challenger Senator Bernie Sanders.

The race to succeed Donna Brazile, who replaced Schultz on an interim basis last July, initially attracted nearly a dozen candidates, seemingly one for every subgroup which the Democratic Party addresses through the medium of identity politics: a gay man, a black woman, a black Muslim man, a white woman from a "red" state, a Hispanic immigrant, etc. But the race has narrowed considerably.

Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison and Tom Perez, the secretary of labor in the Obama administration, lead a field of four candidates who qualified for the final vote by winning the support of at least 20 members of the DNC. Both claim the upper hand going into the weekend and both have received endorsements from leading Democratic Party leaders as well as the trade unions.

A survey of DNC members by The Hill published on Wednesday found that Ellison had the advantage with 105 committed supporters to Perez's 57. Another survey found Perez with a slight lead. Perez received a late boost when the likely third-place candidate, Jaime Harrison, chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party, with the claimed support of 27 members of the DNC, dropped out and endorsed the former labor

secretary.

Harrison's withdrawal means that only two other candidates will appear on the ballot besides Ellison and Perez.

Pete Buttigieg, the 35-year-old mayor South Bend, Indiana, received the endorsement of former DNC chairman Howard Dean on Wednesday. In the candidates' debates and forums Buttigieg boasted of his service in the Navy, having served a tour of duty in Afghanistan in 2014, as well as the fact that he is the first openly gay executive in a Midwestern state dominated by the Republican Party. Also running is Sally Boynton Brown, chair of the Idaho Democratic Party, and the only woman to qualify for the ballot.

If, as expected, no candidate receives the necessary 224 votes to win on a first ballot, balloting will continue until one candidate achieves a simple majority, with the lowest-placed candidate being eliminated in each round of balloting after the second.

Ellison has been endorsed by Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren. The Minnesota Representative has also been backed in his bid to lead the DNC by the AFL-CIO, UAW, UNITE HERE, United Steelworkers, and Locals 1199 and 32BJ of the SEIU. He has also been endorsed by a number of "left" organizations in the orbit of the Democratic Party including the Democratic Socialists of America, the Progressive Democrats of America and the Working Families Party.

Perez on the other hand has received the backing of the bulk of his former colleagues in the Obama administration, having been all but endorsed by former President Barack Obama in January. He has been endorsed by former Vice President Joe Biden, former Attorney General Eric Holder and the former president's senior advisor Valerie Jarrett.

As Obama's Labor Secretary Perez worked with the unions to smother social opposition. For these services he has received the endorsement of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, the United Farm Workers and the United Food and Commercial Workers.

While media reports generally describe Ellison as the "progressive" candidate and Perez as the "establishment" candidate, there is almost no difference between them on policy. Nor does their contest reproduce exactly the lines of the

Sanders-Clinton contest for the presidential nomination last year.

Ellison, as a sitting member of the House of Representatives, has more support among congressional Democrats, including Senate Minority leader Chuck Schumer and former Senate Minority leader Harry Reid, both of whom backed Clinton. Perez has the support of nearly all the Democrats who served with him in the Obama administration.

The campaign itself has drawn little popular interest or even notice outside of the core of Democratic Party functionaries and operatives. At a friendly debate style event Wednesday night hosted by CNN and at regional forums over the last several weeks the Democrats have displayed their demoralization in the wake of Trump's victory and amazement over the wave of protests.

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