

DSA-endorsed “progressive” wins Democratic primary for Queens District Attorney

By Isaac Finn
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Tiffany Cabán, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)-endorsed candidate, declared victory Tuesday night, in the Democratic primary for district attorney of the borough of Queens, New York. According to the Board of Elections, Cabán received 33,814 votes (39.57 percent) and Melinda Katz, the current Queens Borough president, received 32,724 votes (38.30 percent), with the remaining votes divided between five other candidates.

Katz, who had the backing of the Queens Democratic Party organization and most unions, has refused to concede defeat, indicating that she will demand a recount in the close election. The Board of Elections might not issue a final count until July 3, by which time they will have counted the roughly 3,400 absentee ballots. Many news outlets have declared Cabán the winner, on the assumption that the uncounted ballots will be split among all the candidates and will not affect the outcome.

The previous Queens DA, Richard Brown, a Democrat who died in office earlier this year, held office for 28 years without being challenged in any primary. The winner of the primary is heavily favored to win the general election against Republican candidate Daniel Kogan in November.

Cabán’s run for DA and apparent victory in the primary expresses both the hostility of large sections of the population to mass incarceration and police violence, and the divisions between factions within the Democratic Party over how to handle mass anger.

Cabán, who is a public defender, attempted to make appeals to identity politics—her campaign website states that “her fight for justice is inextricably connected to her experience as a queer Latina”—and to insist that as DA she would be capable of addressing mass incarceration and ameliorate some of the most

egregious attacks on the population by the so-called criminal justice system.

According to her campaign website, some of her policies include “Ending Broken Windows Prosecuting,” “Invest[ing] in Schools, Healthcare, Jobs and Housing—Not Jails,” and prosecuting “abusive” landlords and Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) agents. She has also come under attack from the right-wing tabloids, the *New York Post* and *New York Daily News*, for statements on the legalization of sex work.

Cabán in her victory speech hailed the DSA and the Working Families Party, a third party that consistently runs Democratic Party candidates, as the “engine behind this campaign.” She reiterated her identity and cited large sections of her campaign platform before attempting to minimize her supporters’ expectations, stating, “Transforming the system will not be easy. It will not happen overnight.”

Despite Cabán’s victory being depicted as a “blow against the Queens machine,” her campaign has essentially been promoted by sections of the political and media establishment that attempt to sow illusions that the Democratic Party—and the capitalist state apparatus itself—can be reformed. In order to push this illusion, Cabán’s campaign was given a remarkable amount of national media attention for a politically inexperienced candidate running for DA, a position largely ignored by voters within the district.

Even with national media attention, less than 90,000 out of over 760,000 eligible Democratic voters cast a ballot in the primary.

According to exit polls, Cabán’s support was not equally spread throughout the borough. She did well in gentrifying neighborhoods—including Astoria, Sunnyside and Long Island City—but lost to Katz in

predominantly African-American and Hispanic working class neighborhoods. Cabán's strongholds largely overlap with the neighborhoods that voted for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who ran for Congress with the endorsement of the DSA, against incumbent Joe Crowley. The turnout reflected a shared base of support predominantly among more middle-class activist layers inside the Democratic Party.

Cabán's campaign first gained national attention after Ocasio-Cortez endorsed her in May. In an unprecedented action, two Democratic Party presidential candidates—Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren—both publicly endorsed Cabán. Sanders endorsed her via a mass email, claiming that she was “taking on the entire political establishment,” and he sent multiple reminders for his supporters to vote for her in the run-up to the election.

On June 18, the *New York Times*— which functions as a leading voice of the Democratic Party establishment—ran an editorial, “Tiffany Cabán for Queens District Attorney: The Times Endorsement.” The editorial claimed Cabán was the “best pick” in the race, “one of a growing number of prosecutors to show that [keeping people safe] can be done without infringing on civil liberties.”

Cabán may be a political newcomer, but her endorsements reflect the fact that she has close ties to the “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party. All her prominent backers have played a substantial role in bolstering the Democratic Party establishment, despite occasional conflicts. Ocasio-Cortez, following her primary victory in 2018, essentially dropped her demand to abolish ICE. She recently helped bring a bill that granted \$128 million to ICE to the floor and cast a token “no” vote, after it was certain the bill would pass. In 2016, Sanders, after losing the Democratic primary, campaigned for Wall Street's favorite, Hillary Clinton. Warren has served on the Senate Armed Services Committee since 2017, and is a consistent advocate of US imperialism.

Cabán also looks likely to become one of a number of nominally “progressive” DAs who have recently won office across the country. Larry Krasner, the Philadelphia DA, won office in November 2017 with the support of the DSA and on a program similar to Cabán's. After firing a number of prosecutors and

modifying bail demands, he recently came under attack for appealing the decision of the Pennsylvania Superior Court in the Mumia Abu-Jamal case. Krasner's action serves to block Abu-Jamal, an internationally known political prisoner who has spent nearly 40 years behind bars, from appealing his case. Krasner also endorsed Cabán in the primary.

The “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party, with which Cabán proudly associates herself, has already proven a dead end for any struggle against mass incarceration, police and ICE abuse, and the attacks of the corporate elite.

The actions of this layer, whether in running for president or DA, aim at keeping a section of the population that is moving to the left trapped within the confines of the Democratic Party. Any genuine movement to defend democratic rights, halt ICE's terrorizing of working class neighborhoods, or hold abusive landlords responsible requires a mobilization of the working class independent of both the Democrats or Republicans.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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