How the Democratic party has shifted

By JAY BOOTH
Contributing Writer

Just months after being trounced nationwide yet again by former-President Barack Obama and being helpless against a 59-seat Democratic Senate majority and a 258-seat Democratic majority in the House in January 2009, the national Republican Party had basically given up, facing rage from its voters that had little to no hope that the party apparatus would do much of anything to fix the problems of electability within the party. Republican voters knew they didn't like the government's solutions for mortgage relief or its plans to expand healthcare, they wanted things to change.

Over the next few months, primary challenges against those who were seen as "Establishment Republicans" mounted as opposition to the entrenched politicians had peaked, and politician after politician was defeated. Many new faces emerged in the 2010s, including Texas Senator Ted Cruz, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin and former South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint.

Now, over a decade and a half later, the Tea Party is over, but its right-wing populist grip on the Republican Party remains. And yet, between 2025 and 2026, a Tea Party-esque movement gripped the Democratic Party - where the Democratic National Committee got rejected and the party's voters set their own tune.

It started with the surge in popularity of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic Party presidential primaries, where the Vermont Senator challenged former United States Secretary of State and 2008 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who was basically crowned the nominee by the party. Sanders put up a much stronger fight than expected, carrying states across the Rust Belt, including Michigan, Minnesota, Indiana, Wisconsin and old Democratic working-class strongholds like West Virginia.

From there, he contested the nomination again in 2020, when former Vice President Joe Biden fared better against Sanders than Clinton had, but nevertheless, Sanders solidified himself as the figurehead of the more progressive wing of the party.

Over the coming years, new faces would emerge, most notably New York House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who defeated incumbent House Representative Joseph Crowley in a close contest that was considered a great upset in 2018. She quickly became known for her somewhat firebrand-style progressivism and was the young face to Sanders' more experienced appearance. She specifically encapsulated the youthful wing of the party, who had supported Sanders prior and wanted more young politicians to step into the ring.



ILLUSTRATION BY RYLEY LEE

Now we come to the 2026 primary season, where opposition to President Donald Trump is deep within the Democratic Party's electorate, but polls have shown that the electorate sees the party apparatus as not doing enough to oppose Trump - from not being able to stop the One Big Beautiful Bill to the inability to stop judicial nominees pushed by a 53-seat Republican majority Senate, the voter base appears tired of the actions of the national party, both in the House and Senate.

As such, the Democratic "Establishment," controlled-behind-the-scenes entity of politicians that run the Democratic Party - became an enemy of the electorate, and that quickly devolved into more progressive candidates being seen as viable replacements. As discontent within the party caused progressivism to have a revolution of sorts in primary elections across the country, support of Israel collapsed and disapproval of its associated PAC (Political Action Committee, a group that can donate funds to candidates and movements), known as the American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), grew as well.

This wave started early, with signs of its potential strength coming with journalist Kat Abugazaleh, a young political firebrand from Illinois' Ninth Congressional District, only losing to more moderate Evanston, Illinois mayor Daniel Biss by around three points - but both defeated AIPAC's pick, Illinois State Senator Laura Fine, who only got 20% of the vote (Biss got 29.4% and Abugazaleh received 26.3% in a field of sixteen candidates). This would not be the only race that progressives got AIPAC to burn millions of dollars on.

Another case would come months later, in Michigan. Former Wayne County Health Executive Abdul El-Sayed faced off against former House Representative Haley Stevens. Stevens had the backing of most of the "establishment", including getting over $60 million from AIPAC in advertising, as well as Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Michigan Senator Gary Peters, and others; El-Sayed had the endorsement of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren (another somewhat new progressive voice), and other similar progressive champions. A prominent proponent of very progressive agenda points like Medicare For All in a swing state, El-Sayed was trying something that some saw as risky. But considering the very likely Democratic-favorable environment in 2026, others saw this as the year to try running someone so openly progressive in a less-favorable state.

El-Sayed led the polls by up to double digits for weeks leading to the primary, but on Election Night, a huge limitation of the progressive primary challenges presented itself loud and clear - young voters, which were the key bloc to support progressives like El-Sayed, weren't turning out close to as much as older voters were, who tended to support the "establishment" candidates more (and were more susceptible to attacks like calling progressives "socialists" and the like).

El-Sayed ended up winning nonetheless, but by a narrow one percentage point. The same couldn't be said for State Assemblywoman Francesca Hong, a gubernatorial candidate for neighboring Wisconsin. She had been leading the field for weeks leading up to the election, but former Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley un-suspended his campaign a week before the election and consolidated all the support from all the other candidates' supporters, like former Lieutenant Governor and 2022 Senate nominee Mandela Barnes, Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez, and others who had suspended their campaigns in the weeks prior. After Governor Tony Evers endorsed Crowley and polls showed a blatant electoral strength gap between Crowley and Hong (Hong versus Republican presumptive nominee House Representative Tom Tiffany were tossups, while Crowley was consistently leading by about three points), a bit of a shift was seen in primary polls; nonetheless, Hong was leading in them before election night.

But Hong wasn't El-Sayed; she didn't deflect or counter attacks against her as effectively, and it ended up sinking her. In a long, drawn-out contest that lasted until 3 a.m., Crowley defeated Hong by 0.4%, just over 3,300 votes out of over 750,000 cast. The narrow loss potentially saved Democrats in Wisconsin from a Republican governorship, but still showed the gaps in strength the movement had - that it was carried by young voters, but the turnout gap between the age groups could prove fatal.

Now that almost all the primaries nationwide have concluded, the result is mixed at best. Progressives have the first Democratic Socialists of America-endorsed candidate for Senator in Maine with former State House Speaker Troy Jackson and also a wave of "Bernie dogs," a group of politicians endorsed by both the Blue Dog Democrats (economically progressive and socially moderate Democrats) and Sanders, whose reach across the country may show a strength for left-wing populism in the modern era. If it is, it may strengthen the case that the Democratic Party fundamentally must change, which could pioneer even more progressives putting themselves into the electoral picture.

Lessons can be learned from this cycle, mostly that progressives need greater turnout operations for younger voters as well as figuring out how to make their rhetoric more palatable for older voters, even within their own party. But they could hardly be disappointed, as the course of the Democratic Party is definitively changed from here forward - in a way that would make Bernie Sanders smile.

Tim Curry: The corset, the clown and the concierge

By ANTHONY ANGELILLO
Copy Editor

Actor Tim Curry died Aug. 25 at his home in the Toluca Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles.

What stands out is just how iconic Curry was, with some of his most successful films coming out in the '70s and '80s. All the tributes throughout the week don't do justice to the impact he will continue to have.

Curry was born in Cheshire, England, in 1946 and landed his first full-time acting role in the original London cast of "Hair" in 1968.

There he met actor and writer Richard O'Brien, who later handed him a script for a musical about a mad scientist. Curry made the bold decision to change the character's sound and act like a queen.

It was this role in "The Rocky Horror Show" that he would later be best known for. The play opened in London in 1973 before it moved to Los Angeles and Broadway.

The play was adapted into a movie in 1975, but it underperformed at the box office. However, that didn't stop the film from being loved worldwide, as diehard fans would pack midnight screenings with props, costumes and callbacks to the movie.

Considering the time period in which both the play and movie came out, having a movie openly go against traditional American values and feature unapologetic sexuality was such a bold move on the big screen.

Even after over 50 years since the movie's release, the film remains culturally significant. However, even a crushed Curry, who feared this role may cost him his career just when it started, can look back with immense pride on a beloved cult classic.

Curry spent the rest of his career proving he was far more than just one character. He played con artist Rooster Hannigan in "Annie," the butler Wadsworth in "Clue" and the Lord of Darkness in "Legend," a role that took hours in the makeup chair.

In 1990, he became Pennywise in the ABC miniseries adaptation of Stephen King's "It," a performance that ruined storm drains for generations.

Curry was nominated for three Tony Awards for "Amadeus," "My Favorite Year" and "Spamalot."

And if you didn't know him from his on screen apperences, there's a good chance you heard Curry's voice somewhere else and didn't realize it. Curry voiced Hexxus in "FernGully: The Last Rainforest," Long John Silver in "Muppet Treasure Island" and Nigel Thornberry across five seasons of "The Wild Thornberrys" on Nickelodeon.

Curry won a Daytime Emmy in 1991 for playing Captain Hook. He later took over as Palpatine in "Star Wars: The Clone Wars," after Ian Abercrombie, the original voice actor, passed away in 2012.

Then there is the concierge in "Home Alone 2: Lost in New York." Curry played Mr. Hector, the Plaza Hotel employee who correctly guesses that the child in the penthouse suite is running a scam, only to be humiliated for it.

Actor Rob Schneider, who played a bellhop in the film, wrote after Curry's passing that he once watched him play a scene seven different ways. Schneider asked why. Curry told him, "I want to give the director different choices!"

Sadly, the beloved Christmas movie will feel different this holiday season. Curry is the fourth member of the "Home Alone 2" cast to have died in 2026.

The three before Curry were actress Catherine O'Hara, who played Mrs. McCallister on Jan. 30, actress Brenda Fricker, who played the Pigeon Lady in July and singer Jaye P. Morgan, who played a celebrity on a fictional game show just one day before him.

A major stroke in 2012, which Curry suffered during a massage, nearly ended it all. Curry needed brain surgery, used a wheelchair afterward and had to learn to speak again. In Sept. 2025, at a 50th anniversary screening of "The Rocky Horror Show" at the Academy Museum in Los Angeles, he told the audience he had not been able to walk since. Curry continued working primarily with his voice and returned to "Rocky Horror" in 2016 to narrate the television remake.

Tributes have come from all corners of his career. O'Brien said Curry never put himself ahead of the parts he played, calling him "a good egg and class act."

Curry's co-star in "Annie," actress Carol Burnett, who played Miss Agatha Hannigan, said nobody played a lovable villain better. The Muppets account called him an honorary Muppet. King remembered him on Threads as the original Pennywise.

The most heartfelt goodbye came a day later, Aug. 26, at Studio 54, where a Broadway revival of "The Rocky Horror Show" is running. A photo of Curry sat in the lobby. Then, after the performance, actors Luke Evans, Paul Soileau and Jake Shears, who played Frank-N-Furter, shared the stage and sang "I'm Going Home" together. Curry did the part first and more than 50 years later, it took three more to sing it back.


ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY ANGELILLO