

Chicago municipal primary elections to take place Tuesday

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This is part one of an article on the Chicago municipal elections. Part two will cover the city council races.

As did the national midterm elections last year, the municipal elections set to take place Tuesday in Chicago, the third largest city in the US, represent another turn to the right in the whole structure of official American politics. Widespread disgust with both parties prevails as fourteen candidates vie for mayor and as much as one-third of the city council may be ousted in Chicago's city council races.

After two scandal-ridden terms, Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel will leave office and a new mayor will take office after April 2019. A former investment banker, Emanuel served in both the Clinton and Obama administrations.

Emanuel left his job as Obama's White House Chief of Staff to run for mayor of Chicago in 2011 on the promise to "reform" the public schools. He provoked a massive clash with the city's teachers and working families and transformed the city into ground-zero in the Obama administration's right-wing education reform agenda. With the cooperation of the Chicago Teachers Union, he closed 50 public elementary schools, expanded privately-run charters and oversaw the layoffs of thousands of teaching and support positions.

In 2015, Emanuel survived a challenge by Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, a mayoral candidate backed by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), only to be exposed later that year for his role in orchestrating the cover up of the police murder of teenager Laquan McDonald by Chicago police officer Jason van Dyke in 2014.

Throughout both of Emanuel's terms, leading Democrats have emphasized that tough decisions must be made regarding the city budget, which—in addition to attacks on the schools—have resulted in the shuttering of public mental health care facilities, cuts to transit and social services and the constant and growing threat to public sector worker pensions.

There is widespread disgust for the leading candidates to replace Emanuel, all who have legacies of corruption and anti-working class policies going back decades. Last month, the longest serving alderman, Ed Burke, was arrested on extortion charges. Those events elicited more than the usual ritualistic calls for an end to corruption, and a number of Democratic Party hopefuls are seeking to take advantage of the scandal.

Though the major candidates all have a history in local or national political leadership, they are intensely aware of the hatred among working people for the Democratic and Republican parties and are desperately attempting to distance themselves from those responsible for the current state of affairs.

Like many major cities worldwide, Chicago is characterized by nothing more distinctly than social inequality, which has worsened considerably as the number of middle-income earners has shrunk, the number of wealthy in the city has risen, and poverty has expanded dramatically. University of Illinois Chicago's Vorhees Center reports that in the decades between 1970 and 2010, about half (46 percent) of city Census tracts went from middle-income (that's an average individual income 80-120 percent of the

regional average) to about half very low income (or 46 percent of tracts), where individual incomes average 60 percent or less of the regional average.

Very high income tracts (those making 140 percent of regional average income) made up only 4 percent of the city in 1970, while very low income tracts made up 17 percent of the city. By 2010, very high income tracts grew to 15 percent and middle income tracts shrunk to only 16 percent of the city. Geographically, the high income areas are on the north side, while the South and far west sides are home to most of the city's very low income residents.

At a November mayoral forum, the candidates present worked to lower expectations by underlining the long-standing state and municipal budget crisis and pension obligations combined with three consecutive years of population decline. Candidates have promised to meet demands for badly needed infrastructure while proposing to address population loss by insisting the city become more "business friendly."

For the most part candidates must contort themselves to reassure an increasingly nervous ruling class that their interests would be well-served under their leadership while paying lip service to the major issues confronting the working class in the city—issues like police violence, lack of decent employment, low wages, rising costs of housing, and the relentless cuts to public education, public transit and social services.

Officials are reportedly expecting low voter turnout. Pundits anticipate that a run-off in April will likely be between the latest candidate from Chicago's Daley dynasty, Bill Daley, and Cook County Democratic Party boss Toni Preckwinkle.

The major municipal unions represented by the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), which covers public sector workers, the building trades, Teamsters, UNITE Here, United Autoworkers, United Food and Commercial Workers, the Fraternal Order of Police, the Chicago Firefighters Union Local 2 and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31 have declined to formally endorse a primary candidate. However the *Chicago Sun Times*, owned in part by the CFL, has endorsed former federal prosecutor Lori Lightfoot.

The two exceptions to the CFL's formal neutrality are the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Both unions have endorsed Preckwinkle and are active in her campaign.

Of the fourteen candidates, the most significant are:

Toni Preckwinkle

Preckwinkle was recently reelected President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. She is the first African American and woman to serve as Chairperson of the Cook County Democratic Party, which controls the

city and county governments for the most part. Prior to taking over as head of the county board in 2011, she served as an Alderman for 19 years representing the city's 4th ward in Hyde Park.

Her role as a cost-cutter should be taken very seriously. After being elected to lead the Cook County Board she proposed in 2011 to close a \$487 million deficit through massive budget cuts, mass layoffs and furloughs. In 2014, she proposed significant pension cuts.

Preckwinkle remains a leader among that narrow but influential section of wealthy, well-educated property owners with generally conservative politics, long known as the "Lakeshore liberals."

This support is being boosted by Chicago Teachers Union's direct intervention into the mayoral race, a role the union is reprising from the 2015 election. The CTU is currently led by Jesse Sharkey of the International Socialist Organization. Negotiations between the city and CTU for the summer 2019 Chicago Public Schools teachers' contract got underway last month. Part of the CTU political strategy is to ensure they have a cozy relationship with the new boss.

CTU Vice President and Political/Legislative director Stacy Gates has played the leading role in promoting Preckwinkle for mayor. CTU announced its endorsement of Preckwinkle for mayor on December 5, 2018, the second day of the Acero charter teachers strike. Using the teachers' pickets as a backdrop for her campaign, Preckwinkle announced her education platform, which promised a four-year freeze on charter schools and school closings, a return to an elected school board and funding of neighborhood schools. None of those promises can be believed.

Endorsements from the SEIU State Council, which involves Locals 1 and 73, followed that same week bringing in \$1 million in campaign funding. Preckwinkle also received a donation of \$10,000, some but not all of which has reportedly been returned, from alderman Ed Burke. Her campaign has so far raised more than \$4.6 million.

Bill Daley

Daley is brother of former mayor Richard M. Daley and son of former mayor Richard J. Daley who, taken together, ruled the city for 42 years. He is a multimillionaire investment banker and leading figure in the Democratic Party. Daley served as Clinton White House Commerce Secretary and Obama White House Chief of Staff after Rahm Emanuel departed for his mayoral bid.

Daley boasted of his own wealth and political achievements, telling the *Chicago Tribune*: "I had the highest security clearance under Obama and under Clinton. I think they [voters] get a fair understanding, yes, I've done well, and I'm proud of that. They have a sense of who I am based upon my career, mostly in the private sector. They'll make a judgment as to whether or not they think there's something evil there, which there isn't."

His mayoral campaign has taken in more than \$8.6 million, with \$2 million coming in recent weeks from Illinois' most prominent billionaire investor and political activist Ken Griffin of Citadel Investments. Daley has been endorsed by the *Chicago Tribune*.

Lori Lightfoot

Lightfoot is a leading figure in the city's official police oversight efforts since 2002 under former Mayor Richard M. Daley. She headed the now-

defunct Chicago Police Office of Professional Standards and was appointed by Emanuel to the Chicago Police Board (the nominal civilian oversight body) and the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force. The latter was established by Emanuel in the aftermath of the exposure of the murder and cover-up of Laquan McDonald. Prior to these roles, she spent six years as a federal prosecutor.

Lightfoot's campaign has also worked to portray her as a progressive police oversight official, based on sham reforms efforts and her identity as an African-American and lesbian wife and mother.

Lightfoot has been endorsed by the *Sun-Times*, which is owned in part by the Chicago Federation of Labor. Her campaign has taken in more than \$1.5 million.

Paul Vallas

Vallas led the Chicago Public Schools from 1995 to 2001 and would go on to make a career as a "school reformer" nationwide, stripping down public school districts and expanding private charter schools under President Obama's Education Secretary Arne Duncan, himself a former chief executive of CPS.

Positioning himself as a fighter against corruption, Vallas has run a remarkably right-wing demagogic campaign featuring promises to "wage war on violent crime," and calling for a Marshall Plan for Chicago.

At a 2018 mayoral forum he promised to reinvest in long-neglected neighborhoods, pledged to hire minority businesses for city contracts, and expand the number of police. He proposed to recruit police through the Chicago ROTC high schools programs, which he emphasized enroll majority-minority students. He also credited himself for the creation of the ROTC programs.

Vallas has received the endorsement of the Cook County Republican Party.

Garry McCarthy

McCarthy's mayoral bid has been characterized by promising to root out corruption in city hall, and a refusal to cooperate with the Department of Justice's consent decree governing the Chicago Police Department.

McCarthy came to head the Chicago Police as superintendent from Newark, New Jersey where he was embroiled in a police violence scandal. He was appointed by Emanuel in 2011 and fired in the political fallout following the release of the video showing the murder of Laquan McDonald.

During his tenure and under Emanuel, Chicago police were discovered to be operating an unofficial interrogation "black" site in which thousands of residents had been temporarily "disappeared" and at least one was killed.

Undaunted by his firing, McCarthy went on to promote himself as an asset to other city leaders before announcing his mayoral bid. In entering a bid to work with the city of London, he boasted to the British *Sun*, "I'd fix London's police the way I sorted Chicago's."

Other candidates include former mayor Richard M. Daley's Chief of Staff and CPS head Gery Chico; Illinois State Comptroller Susana Mendoza; former alderman Bob Fioretti; Illinois representative and real estate investor LaShawn Ford; former states attorney Jerry Joyce; technology entrepreneur Neal Sales-Griffin; perennial mayoral candidate and businessman Willie Wilson; Austin Chamber of Commerce director

Amara Enyia; and far-right populist John Kozlar.

To be continued



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