

Denver DSA's Democratic Socialist Guide to the 2026 Candidates



Another world is possible.

Not your everyday voter guide

The purpose of Denver DSA's voter guide is to examine our ballots through a socialist lens, understand the forces shaping our politics, and connect elections to the larger project of building working-class power.

Socialism requires an organized working-class movement building power from the ground up in our workplaces and communities. Under capitalism, political power is hardwired to serve the ultra-wealthy. While elections alone won't bring about socialism, electoral organizing is an important part of building a mass working-class movement. Elected officials who fight for the working class can help win meaningful improvements in people's material conditions and create better conditions for organizing. Electoral victories are not an end in themselves, but part of a broader strategy to build working-class power.

Elections also help us to reach working people on a massive scale. Not just to ask for votes, but to raise class consciousness, and bring more people into the movement to transform our society beyond capitalism. To learn more about DSA's goals, read our [Workers Deserve More platform](#).

As you read our guide, keep in mind that a recommendation for a candidate is not an endorsement.

A DENVER DSA ENDORSEMENT means our Chapter has voted to support a candidate who fundamentally represents our values and to commit meaningful chapter resources and volunteer organizing to help elect them.

A DENVER DSA RECOMMENDATION means we believe a candidate would advance important working-class priorities or help create better conditions for organizing. It does not mean we agree with the candidate on every issue or that they represent DSA.

NO RECOMMENDATION in a race from Denver DSA means that we leave the decision whether to vote against a Republican or to abstain from voting in a race up to the voter. Our analysis of the Democratic nominee is that they are significantly misaligned with the interests of the working class and, at best, would require ongoing, organized pressure to push them into real commitment to the working class.

A note on candidates who are included, and those who aren't

Our candidate guide is not meant to be comprehensive; instead, we choose to highlight champions for the working class in the districts where Denver DSA members live – and identify candidates who stand in the way of policies that benefit the working class.

As Democratic Socialists, we take seriously the responsibility to assess the real political stakes of the moment we are in. We are committed to the work of winning meaningful, lasting change in our lives and world.

The GOP is a fascist party whose policies are dangerous and fundamentally opposed to the interests of the multi-racial working class. This election cycle, particularly the federal races, offers an important opportunity to wrest control of the US House out of the hands of the authoritarian right-wing. This would be a critical stepping stone to building a better world, but it is not our horizon. We seek to transform the conditions that made the far right's rise possible in this country, which includes the abysmal failures of a corporate-captured Democratic Party.

DON'T FORGET TO FILL OUT YOUR ENTIRE BALLOT!
CRITICAL ISSUES ARE BEING DECIDED BY BALLOT MEASURES, SO CHECK OUT OUR
BALLOT MEASURE GUIDE.

FEDERAL

U.S. SENATE

NO RECOMMENDATION

Senator **John Hickenlooper** has spent his time in office prioritizing corporate interests over people, maintaining cozy relationships with lobbyists and industry groups. [Funded by AIPAC](#), he has repeatedly supported Israel's genocide in Gaza, continuously voting to provide them arms and funding, while refusing to take even basic steps to stop the ongoing atrocities. He has shown extraordinary spinelessness in standing up to the Trump administration, [often voting in favor of Trump's cabinet picks and legislative priorities.](#)

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1

DENVER DSA ENDORSES Melat Kiros

Denver DSA is very proud to endorse our member **Melat Kiros** as the Democratic Party nominee for the CD-01 seat. Melat ran an inspiring, community-based primary campaign that saw hundreds of DSA members and other everyday Denverites knocking on thousands of their neighbors' doors to have authentic political conversations in a way we have not seen in generations.

The transformative policies that inspired this movement include Medicare for All, Universal Child and Eldercare, Abolishing ICE, and ending the genocide in Gaza and the war in Iran. These policies will help address the cost-of-living crisis that is pressing working Denver families.

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 6 NO RECOMMENDATION

Incumbent **Jason Crow** is a longtime conservative Democrat and friend of the military industrial complex who has received direct donations from the executives of notorious surveillance company Palantir. While he has been an outspoken critic of Trump, he has not backed Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, or abolishing ICE. He has also voted to condemn socialism. As a recipient of [AIPAC funding](#), he does not recognize Israel's actions in Gaza as genocide.

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 7 NO RECOMMENDATION

Brittany Pettersen is a conservative Democrat who aligns herself with corporate interests instead of fighting for working people. She is [supported by AIPAC](#), has expressed support for ICE, and voted to condemn socialism. After her win in 2022, she thanked AIPAC and later promised to “always stand beside them.” In June 2025, after months of ICE raids, she voted for a Republican resolution thanking ICE for “protecting the homeland.” In 2025, she voted for a resolution condemning socialism, passed in the wake of Zohran Mamdani’s win in New York City.

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 8 NO RECOMMENDATION

During his primary race, Representative **Manny Rutinel** walked back several of his former progressive positions, including support for banning fracking, canceling student debt, and Medicare for All. A former activist in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, Rutinel has since renounced that position and recently stated his support for continued U.S. military funding for Israel.

STATEWIDE

GOVERNOR NO RECOMMENDATION

Phil Weiser has had a mixed track record as Colorado AG, successfully pushing back against the Trump administration, blocking the Kroger-Albertsons merger and fighting algorithmic pricing. That said, he also refused to support the Worker Protection Act as authored by a statewide coalition of Labor, rent control measures and continues to support the genocidal state of Israel.

ATTORNEY GENERAL NO RECOMMENDATION

Jena Griswold has served as Colorado’s Secretary of State since 2019. Her record raises serious concerns about her fitness for the Attorney General’s office. She has a near-total lack of courtroom experience, contrary to her false claim that she argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. Her time as Secretary of State has also been cited for worker mistreatment by former staff. There are also major questions on her ability to effectively run an office as important as the Attorney General’s Office, as her time as Secretary of State has been marred with errors such as posting voting machine passwords online accidentally and sending out inaccurate ballots in three separate counties.

SECRETARY OF STATE

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS **Amanda Gonzalez**

Amanda Gonzalez has served as the Clerk and Recorder for Jefferson County since 2023 and has extensive experience running large-scale elections through this position. A former attorney and Executive Director of Colorado Common Cause, she helped to write the laws that created automatic voter registration, expanded ballot drop boxes, and safeguarded fair redistricting, and helped pass a law that made Colorado the first state in the country to require in-person voting in every county jail. Her efforts to expand ballot access and fairness in elections along with her direct experience running elections make her a strong candidate for Secretary of State.

TREASURER **NO RECOMMENDATION**

Jeff Bridges has been a State Representative and State Senator since 2017. He opposes a public bank, preferring a treasurer-run authority with a banker on its board and a public money fund that would guarantee loans to the developers, landlords, and contractors funding his campaign. His SB22-232 and HB24-1316 steered housing funds toward more profitable rental housing for households making up to \$170,000 and away from low income, working class families. As chair of the Joint Budget Committee, Bridges oversaw cuts to state services and said “literally everything is on the table,” including labor contracts, while co-sponsoring the Worker Protection Act. We hope that as treasurer he’ll move away from his capitalist-serving instincts and instead side with rank-and-file labor.

COLORADO SENATE

Senate District 8 **NO RECOMMENDATION**

Dylan Roberts is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

Senate District 19 **NO RECOMMENDATION**

Lindsey Daugherty is the chair of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

Senate District 24 **NO RECOMMENDATION**

Kyle Mullica is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

Senate District 25 **NO RECOMMENDATION**

William Lindstedt is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

Senate District 29

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS Iman Jodeh

Iman Jodeh is a reliable supporter of reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, immigrant rights and on environmental issues. While she voted for the anti-privacy Age Verification Bill, she has been a defender of labor rights, voting for the Labor Protection Act and against surveillance pricing and wage setting as well as raising the overtime threshold for agricultural workers.

Senate District 32

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS Emily Sirota

Emily Sirota is the incumbent of HD-9 and is running for Colorado Senate. She has a good track record on the environment, labor rights and on civil liberties and sits on the powerful Joint Budget Committee, helping navigate the state through difficult financial predicaments due to TABOR. She also has campaigned on getting rid of money in politics, however, some of her votes on sentencing have been concerning and worth taking into account.

Senate District 34

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS Chela Garcia Irlando

Chela Garcia Irlando is the Executive Director of a national environmental nonprofit, Next 100 Coalition, and a proven community leader fighting for universal healthcare and affordable housing. She supports workers rights and stood with striking Alamo Drafthouse workers, JBS workers in Greeley, and with Sheridan teachers. She won her primary this June over an opponent backed by One Main Street money.

COLORADO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

House District 1

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS Javier Mabrey

Javier Mabrey is an eviction defense lawyer, advocating for renters in the courtroom and winning protections in the legislature. He's running on affordable housing, price caps on medicine, free public universities, demilitarizing the police, reproductive care, and raising teachers' salaries by abolishing TABOR.

House District 3

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS Gena Ozols

Gena Ozols is a reproductive rights activist and small business owner running as the Democratic nominee for HD-3. She is campaigning on reproductive rights, labor rights, and racial justice. While her platform is a bit light on details, she has endorsements from the LGBTQ Victory Fund and several unions (Teamsters Local 435, Colorado AFL CIO, UFCW Local 7), Javier Mabrey and Yara Zokaie.

House District 4 NO RECOMMENDATION

Cecelia Espenosa is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

House District 6

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS Iris Halpern

Iris Halpern has spent her career working as a civil and workers rights attorney. In June she unseated Rep. Sean Camacho, a leader of the Opportunity Caucus, despite heavy dark-money spending against her. She worked on a number of bills in the State Legislature to establish greater protections for workers and their families and wants to end subsidies for oil and gas companies, expand protections for unions and tenant unions, and fight for universal healthcare.

House District 7

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS **Jennifer Bacon**

Assistant Majority Leader **Jennifer Bacon** is the current representative of House District 7 and serves on the House Judiciary Committee and the House Education Committee. She has spent her time as a representative fighting for affordable healthcare, affordable housing, and improving public education. She has a solid voting record and will continue to be a representative for the people in her next term.

House District 11

NO RECOMMENDATION

Karen McCormick is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

House District 30

NO RECOMMENDATION

Rebekah Stewart is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

House District 31

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS **Gabriel Cervantes**

After defeating his One Main Street-backed opponent Jacque Phillips in the primary, **Gabriel Cervantes** is committed to taking on corporations hoarding housing by banning corporate ownership of single-family homes and allowing municipalities to regulate corporate mobile home park owners. He also wants to close the loophole that allows giant polluters to appeal to have fines waived and create a legal pathway for Colorado to prosecute ICE agents who break the law.

House District 33

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS **Kenny Nguyen**

Kenny Nguyen is the incumbent representative of House District 33 and has the backing of numerous labor organizations. In addition to fighting for workers' rights protections, Kenny is also working to make housing more affordable, protect the environment, and expand public transit. As the child of refugees, he recognizes the importance of our immigrant neighbors and is working to keep ICE out of our communities.

House District 35

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS **Lorena Garcia**

Representative **Lorena Garcia** is an advocate for working families, fighting for stronger protections and better wages for working people, affordable healthcare and housing, reproductive justice, LGBTQ+ and immigrant rights, and environmental protections for our most vulnerable communities.

House District 36 NO RECOMMENDATION

Michael Carter is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

House District 49 NO RECOMMENDATION

Lesley Smith is a member of the Opportunity Caucus, and has received electoral and financial support from One Main Street and other dark-money groups that leverage concentrated wealth to influence elections and advance corporate interests in Colorado politics.

MUNICIPAL RACES

DENVER CITY COUNCIL AT LARGE B

DENVER DSA RECOMMENDS **Melissa Mejía**

Melissa Mejía is a tireless advocate for renters and brings unmatched experience in city government as a member of the Denver Planning Board and former Denver City Council aide. As the former Director of State and Local Policy at the Community Economic Defense Project, she led the overhaul of Colorado's warranty of habitability for renters in 2024. She also worked on one of the strongest for-cause eviction protections in the country, a ban on unfair occupancy limits, and the first statutory definition of anti-displacement in state law. Beyond housing, her priorities include strengthening protections for unions and immigrants and collaborative policymaking with those most impacted by decisions. A worthy successor to Denver DSA's beloved comrade Sarah Parady, whose vacant seat she is vying for, Mejía is the clear progressive choice for the Denver City Council At Large B seat. She has been endorsed by Melat Kiros, Denver DSA's endorsed candidate for District 1 in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Thank you for taking the time to find and read this ballot guide. A special thank you to all the comrades who participated in researching, writing, and designing this guide and the website that hosts it.

OPPORTUNITY FOR WHOM? PAYING TO PLAY, THE COLORADO WAY.

In October 2025, 17 Democratic state legislators gathered with lobbyists at the [luxury Sonnenalp Hotel in Vail for a private retreat](#) organized by the Colorado Opportunity Caucus, a group of conservative Democratic lawmakers. The retreat became a major political scandal – and brought public attention to an organization that had been operating quietly behind the scenes in Colorado politics for years: One Main Street Colorado.

One Main Street helped organize the retreat and provided \$25,000 to the Opportunity Caucus to cover the legislators' hotel-room block. Colorado Common Cause subsequently filed ethics complaints alleging that legislators violated Colorado's constitutional gift ban by accepting expenses connected to the event. The Independent Ethics Commission advanced the complaints for further proceedings; the legislators deny violating the gift ban.

The controversy grew when a leaked fundraising menu surfaced in a separate lawsuit seeking records from the retreat. The document allegedly offered lobbyists and other interests different levels of access to lawmakers based on contributions: \$25,000 for a panel discussion, \$50,000 for a 30-minute solo presentation and VIP event, \$75,000 for an hour-long presentation and VIP event, and \$100,000 for an hour-long presentation plus two VIP events.

WHO IS ONE MAIN STREET?

Long before the Vail retreat put its name in the news, One Main Street had been an influential player in Colorado politics, primarily by funneling millions in dark money into helping to elect conservative “business friendly” Democrats over progressive candidates. It has also spent heavily in nonpartisan municipal elections across the Front Range, including city council races in Denver, Aurora, Lakewood, Arvada, Westminster, and elsewhere. One Main Street openly describes defeating DSA-backed candidates as a political objective, soliciting donations specifically to “Defeat DSA.”

The scale of outside spending in Colorado legislative races has exploded. In the 2024 primaries, state-level super PACs spent \$5.7 million, more than three times the amount spent in 2020, with 80% of that money going toward Democratic primaries. One Main Street was the second-largest donor to those super PACs, contributing \$800,000 to its own super PAC, which in turn passed \$445,000 to a PAC called, laughably, A Whole Lot of People for Change. That PAC supported Cecelia Espenosa over DSA-endorsed Rep. Tim Hernández in HD4, and Michael Carter over DSA-endorsed teacher Bryan Lindstrom in HD36, as well as Rebekah Stewart in HD30, Jacque Phillips in HD31, and Judy Amabile in SD18. All won their primaries over progressives thanks to an infusion of millions in dark money.

One Main Street's involvement doesn't end when the election does. Many legislators elected with cash from One Main Street went on to join the Opportunity Caucus, and One Main Street Executive Director Andrew Short helped start the caucus. While Short maintains that the Opportunity Caucus is independent, One Main Street's director of advocacy and leadership, Katharine Marrs, is the caucus's registered agent and helps coordinate its activities, including the Vail retreat.

The same political network that helps elect candidates remains part of their political ecosystem once they take office, exerting outsized access and influence.

One Main Street's fortunes reversed in this year's primaries. Despite spending \$1.4 million, six of the eight candidates One Main Street backed lost to their progressive opponents. In HD6, DSA-recommended challenger Iris Halpern defeated incumbent (and Opportunity Caucus Co-Chair) Sean Camacho, Gabriel Cervantes unseated Jacque Phillips in HD31, and Chela Garcia Irlando (who sent a mailer to voters with a picture of One Main Street's Executive Director Andrew Short, calling him a corporate puppeteer) defeated Andrés Carrera in SD34.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

One Main Street does not disclose most of its donors, but tax records provide a partial look at its funding. In 2024, Coloradans for Progress gave One Main Street \$1 million, more than a third of One Main Street's total revenue that year. In turn, Coloradans for Progress reported receiving millions from oil and gas interests, including \$2.2 million from Chevron and \$1.13 million from Coloradans for Responsible Energy Development (CRED). Other records have identified funding to One Main Street from Xcel Energy, the Apartment Association of Metro Denver, construction interests, and other political nonprofits.

That flow of money illustrates a fundamental problem with a capitalist democracy: political influence is ostensibly available to everyone, but the resources needed to exercise it are distributed profoundly unequally. A renter, teacher, service worker, or union member gets one vote. Corporations and wealthy interests can conduct spending and lobbying to exert influence on a completely different scale.

We are all acutely aware that elections do not take place on a level playing field. Working-class organizations build power primarily by organizing people, while the capitalist class deploys its concentrated wealth. Organizations like One Main Street provide a vehicle for converting that wealth into power.

The answer isn't to cede electoral politics to the capitalist class, but to organize. To contest for power at the ballot box and carry that fight far beyond Election Day. Capital is organized to advance its interests through elections and inside government; working people must be organized to advance ours.