Please Help, Then Get Out of the Way

- *The 2026 populist wave that just won*
- *The Democratic establishment that held it back*
- *The debt leadership owes the people who rescued it*

T.Collins Logan · November 2026

The Long List of "Not Now"

In December 2009, Joe Lieberman, an Independent who caucused with Senate Democrats, stood between the American public and a public health insurance option, and he would not budge. A Medicare buy-in he had championed for years suddenly became, in his telling, too costly and unnecessary, and he threatened to filibuster the entire Affordable Care Act unless both ideas were stripped out.[1] Lieberman, we should point out, represented America's *insurance capital*, and had collected more than $1 million from the insurance industry over the course of his career.[2] Of course he wasn't alone — Ben Nelson, Mary Landrieu, and Blanche Lincoln also helped bury the public option[3] — and the White House itself had signaled months earlier it was ready to let the idea go.[4] This was the same "new public plan" the Obama-Biden agenda posted on whitehouse.gov in January 2009, the plan that would set the bar every private policy in a new insurance exchange had to clear and which, on my reading, was intended to help control escalating insurance premiums.[5,6] But by February 2010, the President's own proposal didn't include it at all.[7]

And then the hits to Americans from the Democratic establishment just kept coming. In 2021, eight Senate Democrats voted down a $15 minimum wage.[8] That same year, Joe Manchin — whose family coal brokerage paid him $492,000 in 2020 alone — used his decisive vote to strip a clean electricity program out of Build Back Better.[9] In 2022, Kyrsten Sinema made her vote for the Inflation Reduction Act conditional on preserving the carried interest loophole for private equity and hedge fund managers, and Chuck Schumer said Democrats had "no choice."[10] And in April 2026, as 40 of 47 Senate Democrats voted to block a sale of military bulldozers to Israel, John Fetterman joined Schumer and five others in voting no.[11]

Each of these was sold to American voters as "pragmatism." But taken altogether, they sure look a lot more like a cohesive pattern: the people most eager to tell American progressives what isn't possible always seem to provide generous room for what their donors need.

So it wasn't surprising when, two days before this November's election, Rep. Haley Stevens — who had lost Michigan's Senate primary to Abdul El-Sayed despite AIPAC's super PAC spending roughly $31 million to boost her campaign and attack ads against him — withdrew her endorsement of El-Sayed and backed the Republican instead.[12,13] El-Sayed won anyway. So did an entire class of candidates who ran

against exactly this kind of politics. The question before us now is simple: will the Democratic establishment help these newly elected progressives…and then get out of their way...or will they continue the pattern of "not now" while enabling their donors' agendas...?

Who Just Won, and What They Ran On

On November 3, Democrats took back both chambers of Congress.[12] El-Sayed beat Mike Rogers in Michigan. James Talarico flipped Texas, ending a 32-year Democratic losing streak there.[14] Troy Jackson, a logger from Allagash, retired Susan Collins. Sarah Trone Garriott, a Lutheran minister, flipped Iowa's 3rd District. And six candidates endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America won House seats: Darializa Avila Chevalier and Claire Valdez in New York, Melat Kiros in Colorado, Angela Gonzales-Torres in California, Donavan McKinney in Michigan, and Chris Rabb in Pennsylvania.[15]

This is not a monolith, and its breadth is precisely what we should be embracing. A democratic socialist lawyer from Denver and a Lutheran pastor from suburban Des Moines won't agree on everything. Talarico favors letting people buy into Medicare rather than instituting single-payer, and Trone Garriott ran on a public option alongside private plans.[14,16] But let's look at what they share.

Table 1. What the new class ran on
● = confirmed position | ◐ = partial or weaker version | ? = position not available in sources

	Universal health care	Reject corporate / AIPAC money	Restrict arms to Israel	End the Iran war	Tax the rich
El-Sayed (MI-Sen)	●	●	●	●	●
Talarico (TX-Sen)	◐	●	◐	●	?
Jackson (ME-Sen)	●	●	●	●	●
Trone Garriott (IA-03)	◐	◐	?	●	?
Kiros (CO-01)	●	●	●	●	?
Avila Chevalier (NY-13)	●	●	●	●	●
Valdez (NY-07)	●	●	●	●	●
McKinney (MI-13)	●	◐	●	●	●
Rabb (PA-03)	●	?	●	?	?
Gonzales-Torres (CA-34)	◐	◐	●	?	?

Sources: Democracy Now!, State News, Common Dreams (El-Sayed); Yahoo News, Jewish Insider, NewsNation (Talarico); jacksonformaine.com, Jewish Insider (Jackson); Iowa Public Radio, States Newsroom, smarter.vote (Trone Garriott); Reason, Christian Century, Democracy Now! (Kiros); Israel Hayom, ynet (Avila Chevalier, Valdez, McKinney, Rabb); Salon (Avila Chevalier); Queens Eagle (Valdez); U.S. News, NBC Philadelphia, AOL/New York Post (McKinney, Rabb, Gonzales-Torres).

Where their positions are on record, they cluster around the same core: expanding health coverage, ending the Iran war, and getting corporate and AIPAC money out of our politics. On Israel, nine of the ten are on record for restricting arms to Netanyahu's government. Even the most cautious of the Senate winners, Talarico, said he would not vote to send weapons to that government.[17] These candidates won in deep-blue Brooklyn and Denver, yes — but also in Texas, Maine, and a Trump-won Iowa district. Whatever else we might conclude, we can't pretend this agenda is an electoral liability. To be clear, the new majority also rests on moderates who flipped swing seats. So the relevant point here isn't that progressives won Congress on their own, *but that their agenda has demonstrated it can win almost anywhere*.

What Americans Have Wanted All Along

None of this is fringe; it's what majorities of Americans have been telling pollsters for years.

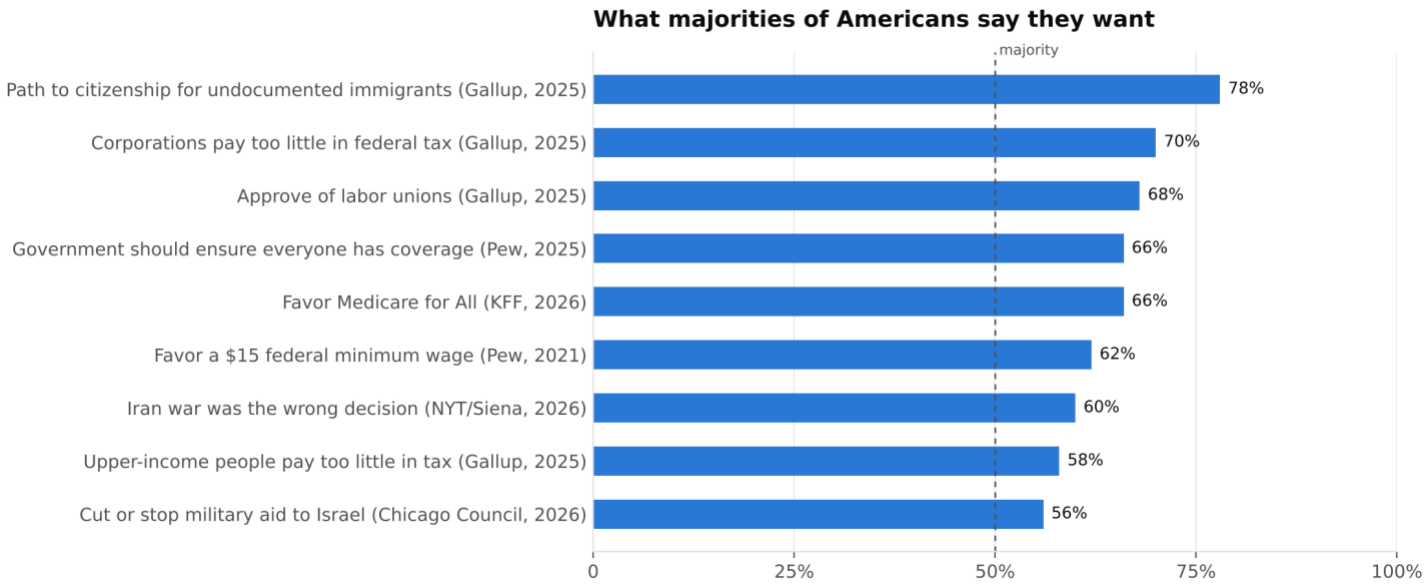


Figure 2. Sources: Gallup (Jun 2025, citizenship; Aug 2025, unions; Mar 2025, taxes); Pew Research Center (Nov 2025); KFF (Sep 2026); Pew (Apr 2021); New York Times/Siena (Sep 2026, "about 6 in 10" likely voters); Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2026).

Seven in ten Americans say corporations pay too little in federal taxes.[18] Two-thirds say the federal government should make sure everyone has health coverage,[19] and two-thirds favor Medicare for All, up from 53% in 2020.[20] *And this isn't a new mood.* Gallup found majorities saying the government should guarantee health coverage every year from 2000 through 2008, a dip below half during the years of relentless GOP attacks on the ACA, and a return to 62% by 2024.[21] This pattern holds well beyond healthcare, with Gallup finding 68% of Americans approve of labor unions, near a 60-year high, and 78% back a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements. That points to a constructive immigration agenda Democrats should be pressing hard — a legal path to citizenship, plus fully funded and staffed immigration courts to work through a backlog of some 3.4 million cases,

allowing the average wait to be reduced from some *600 days* — instead of ceding the issue to an administration fixated on mass deportation.[21]

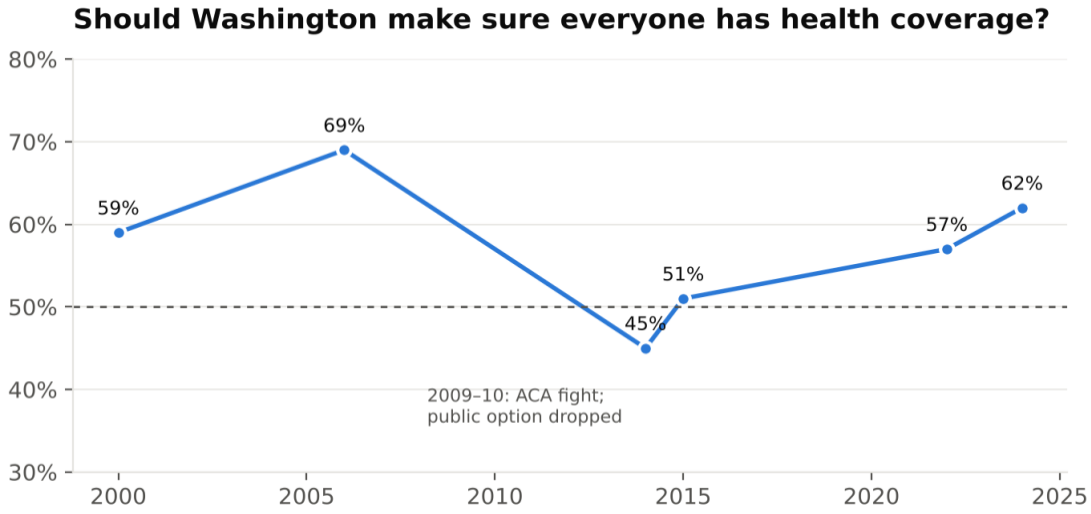


Figure 3. Share answering yes. Source: Gallup Health and Healthcare survey, selected years.

With that said, these public majorities are not always bipartisan. On taxes, a 48% plurality of Republicans say the wealthy pay their fair share, while 87% of Democrats say they pay too little.[22] Support for Medicare for All drops to 52% when people are told it would eliminate private plans — still a majority, and far above the 37% who said the same in 2020.[20] And people need to know the flagship Medicare for All bills allow private insurance *only for supplemental benefits the program doesn't cover*, not for duplicate coverage of what it does.[23] Most privately insured Americans believe they would keep their current plan.[20] But they wouldn't; they would instead have something better — and we need to clarify that before it becomes the opposition's talking point.

On Israel, the overall shift has been seismic. Six in ten Americans now view Israel unfavorably,[24] and in Gallup's polling Democrats sympathize more with Palestinians than with Israelis by 65% to 17%.[25] Republicans remain solidly pro-Israel, but a majority of all Americans — 56% — now want U.S. military aid to Israel cut or stopped.[26]

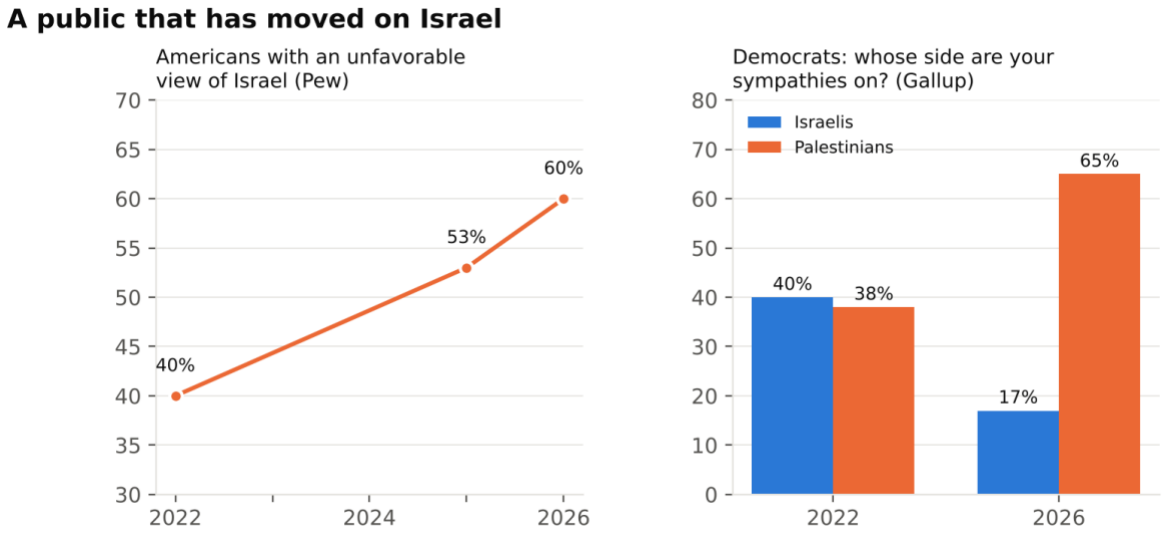


Figure 4. Sources: Pew Research Center (2022 figure approximate, as reported; 2025; Mar 2026); Gallup World Affairs survey (Feb 2022, Feb 2026).

Why the shift? Well, I suspect it's because people can count. Gaza's Health Ministry reports 73,651 Palestinians killed as of September 2026 — a figure that doesn't distinguish civilians from combatants.[27] UN officials and human rights groups have described this campaign as genocidal; Israel rejects the charge, and the International Court of Justice has yet to rule. In the West Bank, more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 2023, and UN data show a record 1,828 settler attacks and some 37,000 people displaced in 2025 alone.[28] These numbers can speak for themselves. As for Iran, Trump launched that war on February 28 without congressional authorization. About six in ten likely voters told pollsters this fall that going to war there was the wrong decision. This is with eighteen U.S. service members having died in it by September, and more than 3,600 people killed in Iran — some 1,700 of them civilians — according to the independent rights group HRANA.[29]

The Collins Pattern

For three decades Susan Collins perfected a particular art: furrowed concern in front of the cameras, followed by party loyalty when the roll was called. Mainers just retired her. The Democratic establishment's version of this art is subtler. While its leaders also mostly vote with their party, what they control is what gets written, what gets watered down, and what never reaches the floor at all.

In fairness, the Democratic establishment has delivered real wins: the American Rescue Plan, the CHIPS Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act, the largest climate investment in U.S. history.[30] But even those landmark bills were trimmed and reshaped by the Manchins and Sinemas of the caucus, as well as by donor-friendly drafting, long before they reached the President's desk.

Table 2. What was promised, and what happened

Year	The popular position (broad public support)	What Dem leadership and the establishment delivered
2009	A public option in the Obama-Biden health plan (57–68% support)	Dropped under Lieberman's filibuster threat, with support from Nelson, Landrieu, and Lincoln
2019	Bipartisan fix for surprise medical bills (78% support)	Stalled by Neal's counterproposal; $54,000 from opposing lobbyists then followed
2021	$15 minimum wage (62% support)	Eight Senate Democrats vote no
2021	Clean Electricity Performance Program (66% support)	Stripped at Manchin's insistence
2022	Medicare drug price negotiation (83% support; H.R. 3: up to 125 drugs)	Inflation Reduction Act: 10 drugs to start
2022	Close the carried interest loophole (77% support)	Dropped for Sinema; Schumer saying Democrats had "no choice"
2022	Ban congressional stock trading (63% support)	House leadership scraps a pre-election vote, saying the bill needed more study
2026	Stop sending bombs to Israel (56% want aid cut or stopped)	Schumer among seven Democrats voting against both resolutions
2026	Medicare for All (two-thirds support)	Jeffries: not legislation he supports

Sources: CBS News, CS Monitor (2009); Sludge, The New Republic (2019); Axios (2021 wage); E&E News (2021 CEPP); Cronkite News (2022 drugs); CNBC/NBC DFW (2022 carried interest); The Hill (2022 stock ban); Time, Chicago Council (2026); Common Dreams (2026). Polling: CBS News (Sep 2009); KFF (Sep 2019; Oct 2021); Data for Progress (Sep 2021); Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting (Nov 2019, via Americans for Financial Reform); Pew (Apr 2021); Morning Consult (Jan 2022); Chicago Council and KFF (2026).

Let's consider Hakeem Jeffries. On the opening day of the current Congress, he promised Democrats would "fight to defend the free enterprise system" — while trying to make it work better for working people.[30] This August, asked on *Meet the Press* whether he would vote for Medicare for All, he said it's "not legislation that I currently am co-sponsoring or that I support."[31] This from a member who signed on as a cosponsor in 2019, after a months-long activist pressure campaign.[32] When the leader of the House Democrats frames government healthcare as something to be cautious about, he is reciting the other side's talking points for them.

On the other side of the ledger, Jeffries has endorsed progressive incumbents facing AIPAC money, including Ilhan Omar,[33] and he whipped his caucus behind the Iran war powers resolutions, just as Schumer opposed the war in the Senate.[34,11] So credit where it is due. But then we need to look at who leadership shields. Henry Cuellar was indicted for allegedly taking some $600,000 in bribes tied to an Azerbaijani state oil company and a Mexican bank, and Jeffries called him "a highly valued member" of the caucus, and when Trump pardoned him said the right outcome had been achieved.[35] Cuellar went on to vote against limiting Trump's war powers in Iran.[36] Earlier, Cuellar, Don Davis, and Gottheimer were among 46 House Democrats who helped pass the Laken Riley Act, which requires detaining

undocumented immigrants merely charged with or arrested for theft-type offenses — no conviction required.[36] Josh Gottheimer was the first Democrat to come out against a war powers resolution, then voted for it days into the war while still backing the strikes.[34] Richard Neal stalled a bipartisan fix for surprise medical bills while collecting $54,000 from lobbyists for the very interests opposing it, and earlier championed a "free file" provision that actually barred the IRS from offering free tax filing itself.[37]

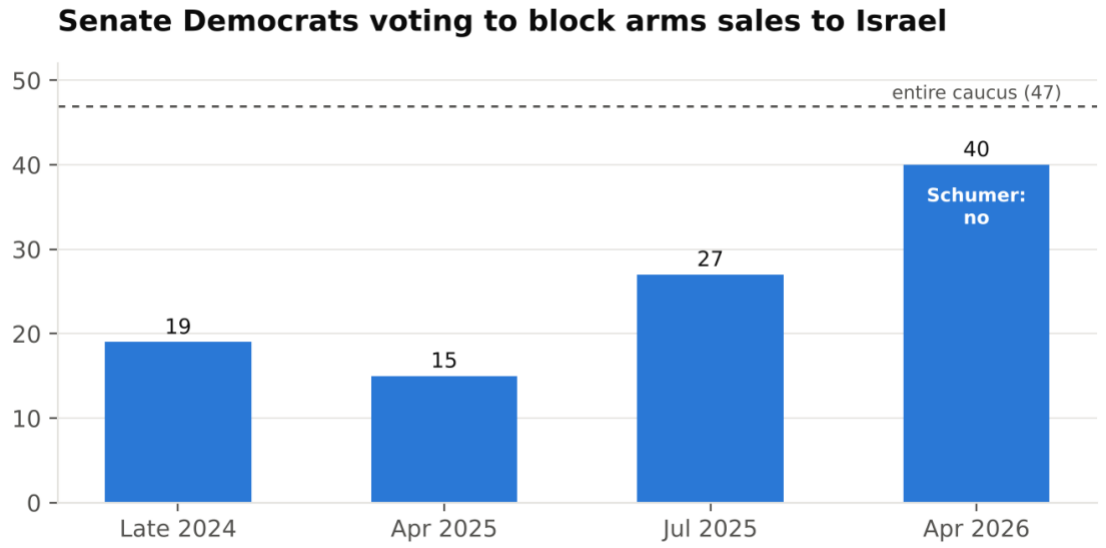


Figure 5. Largest Democratic vote on each round of Sanders resolutions. Sources: Portside/Zeteo (2024 high of 19); Washington Times (Apr 2025); The Intercept (Jul 2025); Time and NOTUS (Apr 2026).

And Schumer? While four-fifths of his caucus finally caught up with public opinion on arming Israel, he lagged behind with Fetterman.[11]

Follow the Money — But Not Only the Money

Why does this keep happening? The money, at least, is well documented. From 2009 to 2014, Schumer raised $3.9 million from the securities and investment industry, 15% of everything he took in.[38] In the 2023–24 cycle, AIPAC-affiliated donors were Jeffries' largest source of contributions at roughly $866,000, alongside $1.3 million from securities and investment and $814,000 from real estate, according to OpenSecrets data.[39] AIPAC itself has boasted of endorsing the entire House Democratic leadership team, and of helping elect Shontel Brown, Haley Stevens, Henry Cuellar, and Don Davis.[40]

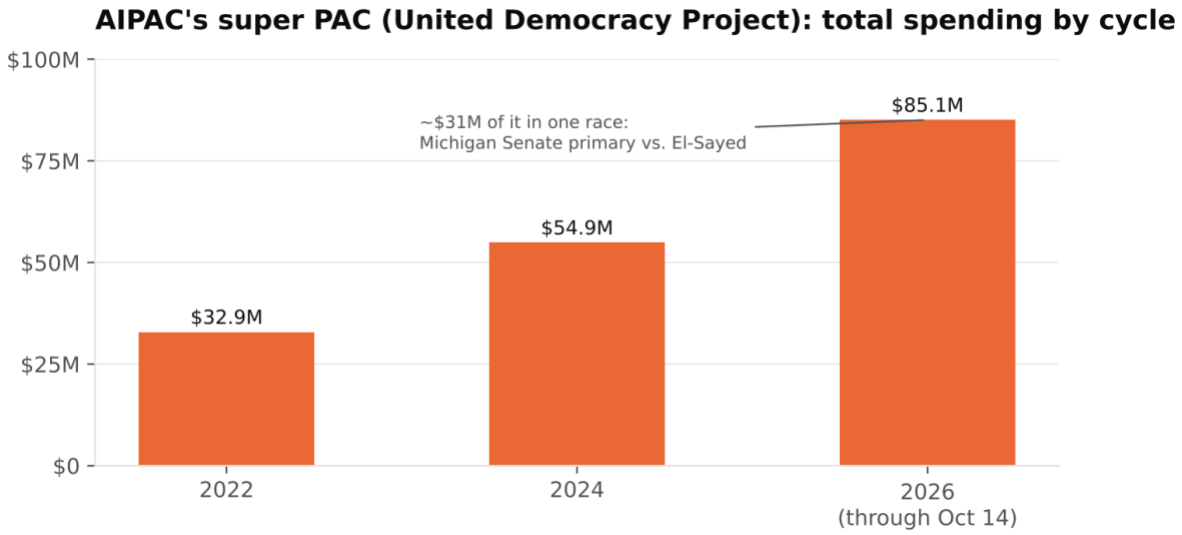


Figure 6. Sources: FactCheck.org (2022); ProPublica Itemizer/FEC (2024, through Dec 31); FEC filings (2026, through Oct 14); Inside Political Money (Michigan).

AIPAC's super PAC also raised $112.8 million this election cycle, drawing on donors like Paul Singer, Marc Rowan, and Haim Saban.[41,42] It then spent more in the Michigan primary than in any race in its history — and lost. It lost enough elsewhere, too, that in October AIPAC announced it would stop endorsing candidates and giving to them directly, while keeping its super PAC very much alive.[43]

But money isn't the whole story. The filibuster is real. Swing-district fear is real. And some establishment Democrats genuinely believe in incrementalism — a temperament with conservative roots. The famous 2014 Gilens-Page study claiming ordinary Americans have no influence at all has also been seriously challenged: later analyses find that median-income Americans get their way about as often as the affluent do when the two disagree.[44] Yet the leading critic of that study, Peter Enns, argues that the real gap in influence lies between everyone else and the superrich — the top 0.01%.[44] That is to say, precisely the donor class that funds super PACs.

Then there is the plainer kind of corruption Americans keep telling us they're sick of: an indicted congressman pardoned and welcomed back, and a former Speaker who once defended members' right to trade individual stocks — even as she, Schumer, and Jeffries now say they would support a ban that Congress somehow never passes.[35,45,46]

Please Help, Then Get Out of the Way

With all of this in mind, let's be clear-eyed about the next two years. Trump holds the veto until January 2029, and Congress almost certainly lacks the two-thirds to override him. Meanwhile his "unitary executive" antics, with Stephen Miller's cruel flourishes, will keep testing whether laws mean anything at all. History offers a warning: in Germany's last free election of 1932, the Nazi vote actually fell — and

conservative elites handed Hitler the chancellorship anyway.[47] Winning elections is necessary, but it is not sufficient.

So what should Democratic leadership do? I would propose five things:

1. **Hold contested leadership elections.** Peggy Flanagan, Troy Jackson, Abdul El-Sayed, Juliana Stratton, and Adam Hamilton — all senators-elect — have said they won't back Schumer.[48] **They have the party's base behind them: in mid-2025, 62% of Democrats told Reuters/Ipsos that the party's leadership should be replaced with new people.**[48] He should step aside for experienced progressives who have carried these bills for years, and House leadership should welcome the same contest. This isn't a call for any particular successor; it's a call for an open contest in which experienced progressives get a fair shot to lead.
2. **Let the votes happen.** Kiros put it best: her demand is not that Jeffries support Medicare for All, but that he let the House vote on it.[49] Floor votes force Republicans onto the record — and some will break, just as Iowa's Zach Nunn and Mariannette Miller-Meeks switched to support Iran war powers limits once their voters turned on the war.[50] And many Republican voters already agree with us: 71% of Republicans backed letting Medicare negotiate drug prices, 71% backed a fix for surprise medical bills, and 58% backed a congressional stock trading ban.[50]
3. **Write the 2029 agenda now.** Have hearings, markups, CBO scores, and passed bills on Medicare for All, a living wage, taxing extreme wealth, and campaign finance reform — so that, as Kiros has argued, a Democratic trifecta can sign them on day one.[51] Imagine a first hundred days that puts Trump's to shame, not with executive orders but with mature legislation already vetted and waiting to be signed.
4. **Use the power of the purse.** Defund the Iran war, as Jackson argued on the debate stage, and condition military aid to Israel on international law.[52]
5. **Break with the donors.** Refuse corporate PAC and AIPAC money, as most of our new class already does. Pass the stock trading ban. Push to overturn *Citizens United*. And give the newcomers real committee seats, staff, and floor time.

Here's a final consideration: in-fighting and fear have paralyzed Democrats for decades, and every time leadership blinks — on the public option, on the minimum wage, on Gaza — the people paying the price are the ones who voted for them. Unity isn't achieved by asking the majority of the party to keep quiet, but by uniting behind solutions that have been debated for years and that most Americans already want.

None of this guarantees success, and we should be clear-eyed about that. Leadership challenges can fail, and the freshmen who mount them may pay for it in committee assignments. A floor vote on Medicare for All could lose, and any Democratic defections would hand opponents a ready-made talking point. And all of it plays out under an erratic and vindictive President, an administration working from the

Project 2025 playbook to dismantle constitutional checks and balances, and lawless appointees across every federal agency and department who could slow-walk, ignore, or sabotage whatever this Congress manages to pass. As the Weimar Republic reminds us, a democracy can lose to people who never won a majority. But none of this is a reason to keep saying “not now.” Instead it is the very reason our work has to start immediately — and the reason the people who just won deserve leadership that clears the path instead of blocking it.

For my part, this agenda is a bare floor...not a ceiling. Fully healing our political economy will require going much further, and I’ve sketched what that could look like at www.ourpublicagenda.org. But first things first. The voters just handed Democrats a mandate and a new generation of leaders to carry it. The least the old guard can do is offer sincere help…and then get out of the way.

What do you think? Let me know at tcollins@integrallifework.com.

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