

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

28-year-old socialist challenges Democratic establishment and wins

Before she ended the 20-year congressional career of Rep. **Joe Crowley**, D-N.Y. and upset her city's most powerful political machine, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez had organized for **Bernie Sanders** in New York. She'd rallied at **Standing Rock**. She'd worked with Bronx Progressives and the **Democratic Socialists of America** to lobby Crowley's office; she was cheered when the congressman endorsed the House's "**Medicare for All**" legislation. In May, encouraged by the activists she'd been working with, the 28-year-old Ocasio-Cortez filed to challenge Crowley. It was a long shot, but it was at least a way to build a political movement. "If [the district] can be more educated, more organized, more invested than we were a year ago," she told WYNC in November 2017, "then this campaign will have been 100 percent worth it."

Ocasio-Cortez has won the June primary election and looks to be on her way to Congress, running in a district that gave 78 percent of its vote to Hillary Clinton and that Republicans aren't seriously contesting. There, she could be the youngest woman elected by either political party. Before this year, Crowley had never come close to losing in New York's 14th Congressional District. Republican reaction to Ocasio-Cortez's win was mostly about Crowley's defeat and how his party's establishment had lost to a self-described socialist.

That was what Ocasio-Cortez had set out to do - replace the party establishment, and the Queens Democratic Party machine controlled by Crowley, with a new establishment and a new electorate. Justice Democrats and Brand New Congress, among the progressive groups that had urged her to run, ended up staffing her campaign. She wasn't inclined to back House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi for speaker, name-checking one of the House's most left-wing members as a better choice.

"**I'd like to see new leadership, but I don't even know what our options are,**" she said. "**I mean, is Barbara Lee running? Call me when she does!**"

Ocasio-Cortez's politics are substantially to the left of most of the party, and even Sanders. In her campaign videos and posters, designed by friends from New York's socialist circles, she came out for the abolition of ICE, universal Medicare, a federal jobs guarantee and free college tuition. The ads also made it clear that she was a different candidate - a young Latina from the Bronx, not a white man from Queens. Her viral campaign video, created by a socialist team called Means of Production, began with her saying that "**women like me aren't supposed to run for office,**" over an image of her getting ready for the day in a busy apartment building.

Detaining a Poem

One day,
they stopped me,
shackled me,
tied up my body, my soul,
my everything...
Then they said: search her,
we'll find a terrorist within her!
They turned my heart inside out—
my eyes as well,
rummaged through even my feelings.
From my eyes they drew a pulse of inspiration;
from my heart, the ability to sketch out meanings.
Then they said: beware!
She's hiding weapons deep in her pockets.
Search her!
Root out the explosives.
And so they searched me...
Finally, they said, accusing me:
We found nothing
in her pockets except letters.
We found nothing except for a poem.

-Dareen Tatour
convicted by Israeli courts of
inciting violence and terrorism,
for a poem.



In interviews last week, as Ocasio-Cortez canvassed voters in Queens, she said her campaign began with **grassroots organizers** and took off once national left-wing media noticed what she was doing. An early profile in the **Intercept**, she said, was "**a game-changer,**" leading to more interviews and profiles that led with the audacity of her challenge, then got to her policies. By the final week of the campaign, when she briefly left the state to see conditions at immigrant detention centers in Texas, she was updating **Vogue** on how the campaign was going.

"**The biggest hurdle that our communities have is cynicism - saying it's a done deal, who cares, there's no point to voting,**" Ocasio-Cortez told volunteers before one of their canvasses. "**If we can get somebody to care, it's a huge victory for the movement and the causes we're trying to advance.**"

Why challenge Crowley? She would explain: He was a "**Corporate Democrat,**" who received more money from corporate **PACs** than from local donors - and from the developers who were driving up housing costs. He had voted to create the Department of Homeland Security. He'd voted for the war in Iraq. He'd voted for **PROMESA**, the bill that created a hated bankruptcy board to handle Puerto Rico's debt.

"**My grandfather died in the storm,**" Ocasio-Cortez tweeted last month. "**Your acts shut schools and starved public services when we needed them most.**"

None of that had stopped Crowley in the past, but Ocasio-Cortez was convinced that it could - if she met the voters who were angry about it. Her campaign began with phone banks that targeted thousands of unaffiliated voters, informing them that they needed to register as Democrats six

months before the election if they wanted to vote in the primary. It purchased the Democratic voter list, but Ocasio-Cortez's team found the built-in technology to be too clumsy, so they built their own app and handed it to volunteers.

The campaign's greatest weapon was Ocasio-Cortez herself, who proved to be a natural candidate with a compelling story. She was the first to admit that she had bounced around, from Sen. Ted Kennedy's office to the National Hispanic Institute to political organizing to the service industry. She had to; her family had been hit hard during the 2008 financial crisis.

Crowley did not take the challenge lightly, spending \$1.5 million, more than five times as much as his opponent. In his own campaign messaging, Crowley called himself "**Joe from Queens,**" and emphasized how his clout in Washington made him an ideal opponent to Donald Trump.

Ocasio-Cortez simply outplayed Crowley, who many congressional reporters saw as a potential speaker of the House, across the media. One of her greatest coups came a week before the primary, when a Bronx newspaper held a candidate forum and Crowley could not attend. Ocasio-Cortez showed up early, shaking hands even though the crowd was thin.

Crowley had sent Annabel Palma, a former city councilwoman, to take his place, even though she occasionally confessed not to know Crowley's positions on issues in front of Congress. (She was heckled after saying, correctly, that Crowley supported moving America's embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The day that embassy was moved, Ocasio-Cortez condemned the massacre of Palestinians who had protested it, and tweeted that "**Democrats can't be silent about this anymore.**")

The first-time candidate was clearly getting the best of the longtime city councilwoman. Ocasio-Cortez's focus stayed on Crowley. Early in the debate, before she was told not to stand during answers, she paced the stage and said that her campaign was of, by, and for the Bronx.

"**We have touched the hearts and minds of all families here. We are fighting for an unapologetic movement for economic, social, and racial justice in the United States,**" said Ocasio-Cortez.

She turned and faced Palma. "**With all due respect,**" she said, "**I'm the only one running for Congress in this room.**"

-Reporting from David Weigel
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LOCAL PATIENT CHALLENGES FEDERAL DRUG POLICY

Legal experts say the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA)** recent approval of a cannabis-derived medication for epilepsy could undermine the federal government's position that marijuana has no accepted medical use.

"**It defeats the argument that a plant-based medicine can't be approved by the FDA,**" said attorney Zenia Gilg, who has worked in federal cannabis law for 24 years.

The recent move to approve **Epidiolex**, a cannabis-based treatment for epilepsy without the high-inducing chemical THC, has already given rise to a fresh legal challenge against the federal government's marijuana policy.

Humboldt County resident **Emma Nation** has filed suit against the Trump administration in federal court, seeking an injunction to stop a local housing authority from evicting her from federally subsidized housing because she uses medical cannabis in edible form.

Nation's lawyer, Frederic Fletcher of Eureka, California, said this is the only case he is aware of in which a person has challenged the denial of federal benefits based on a patient's use of medical marijuana.

Unlike prior cases in which courts have upheld the federal government's right to criminalize state-sanctioned medical pot, Fletcher said the **FDA's** June 25 decision to approve a cannabis-based medication has changed the game.

"**The previous problem with a lot of these cases was they were challenging the FDA's assessment that cannabis had no medical use,**" Fletcher said. "**We don't even need to go there. The FDA has already done that part.**"

Nation lives in a federally subsidized housing unit in Arcata. She is set to be evicted this month unless a state court judge in a separate legal action grants her temporary relief, her lawyer said.

According to Nation's lawsuit, a maintenance worker entered her bedroom without permission and found a small bag of medical cannabis, which was reported to the local housing authority that supplies Nation's rent subsidy.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires that the local housing authority evict Nation for possessing medical marijuana, according to her complaint.

The lawsuit filed by Nation on Monday claims federal marijuana policy does more than just restrict the rights of medical cannabis patients. It also wreaks havoc on Humboldt County's environment by encouraging illegal growing operations.

-Nicholas Lovino
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