

AOC is the Democrats' best shot against Trump in 2024
Michael Starr Hopkins (opinion contributor) - The Hill

When Barack Obama came out of nowhere to win his Senate seat in 2004, it almost felt preordained. As if he was the person we had been waiting for to breathe fresh air into the Democratic Party.



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Flash forward to 2018, and the meteoric rise of a 29-year-old bartender from Queens feels eerily similar. She has been unafraid, unapologetic and unwilling to bend to the will of Washington. She is a force to be reckoned with, and in 2024 Democrats are going to need her force to reckon with Republicans.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) is less of a personality and more of a movement. Yes, the smart, photogenic congresswoman is the face of the rising progressive movement, but she is also the future of the Democratic Party.

AOC has cultivated a following beyond politics. She's an influencer in its purest form. Her ability to relate to her supporters and allow them a glimpse into her private life is a blueprint for Democrats trying to act less like mannequins and more like humans.

She's the voice of a movement that began after the banks were bailed out by the government, while homeowners were left to default. The simplicity with which she talks about everyday struggles hints that she's not just a persona for consumption.

She isn't beholden to corporations, is a prodigious small-dollar fundraiser, and could out-Trump Trump like no other politician has been able to.

If Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) is the Godfather, Ocasio-Cortez is Michael Corleone. As the architect of [Medicare for All](#), a [\\$15 minimum wage](#) and numerous other programs that are now mainstream, Bernie's place in history has already been solidified.

While Sanders may disagree with some of the progressives in his caucus, his worth carries major weight. Bernie passing the torch to AOC and recruiting her to run for president would be bold and would strengthen and solidify her base of supporters before she even gets out of the gate.

AOC wields a superpower that is rarely found in Washington: She isn't afraid to lose. Her 2018 victory wasn't just historic, it was shocking, and felt predestined — much like when we first saw a brilliant speaker with a funny name and big ears remind us that through hope and change we could put our country on a new course.

AOC has the ability to tell the story of her generation. She's Barack Obama if Barack Obama was an actual progressive. I love Obama, but he was a moderate who sounded like a progressive.

Ocasio-Cortez represents the possibilities and opportunities that make our country great. Where else could a 29-year-old bartender [upset a political heavyweight](#) and become a symbol for her generation?

AOC was never supposed to win her race. Few gave her a chance, but a funny thing happened: Voters loved her honesty, youth and humble beginnings. Voters were sick of career politicians who rarely came back to their districts. So they voted Joe Crowley out and AOC in.

That wasn't luck, that was fate. In a Democratic Party that looks more like a Golden Girls spin-off than a reflection of our rich diversity, AOC has become the face of a generation.

It would have been easy for her to walk into Congress and hire nothing but communications staff. It would have been easy for her to sell out and do the cash grab. She could have publicly made Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Charles Schumer's (D-N.Y.) lives a living hell just to show off for her supporters.

Instead, she did her homework and tried to fly under the radar while learning the nuances of Congress and the levers of power that run it. She did exactly what you would want your number one draft pick to do: She prepared for the moment. Her tough questioning of corporations and industry leaders has been a viral hit that adds to her credentials. AOC rarely backs down from a fight.

The congresswoman holds no punches when it comes to Sens. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.). Echoing [my previous calls](#) for Sinema to face a primary challenge, AOC [publicly declared](#) that she “should be” Primaries and [said this of Manchin](#):

“This idea that one person gets to go on television and provide weak arguments as to why they are blocking the basic civil rights of our Americans, and journalists don't push back, and our party leadership doesn't push back, and the president doesn't push back forcefully — that makes me mad.”

[A new CNN poll](#) finds that 75 percent of Democratic and Democratic-leaning voters want the party to nominate someone other than President Biden in 2024. Should President Biden announce that he will not seek a second term, AOC would represent

the bridge that he hoped to create. Much like Barack Obama talked about his [student loan debt](#), AOC can uniquely talk about the struggles of a forgotten generation waiting for someone to speak up for them.

If Jan. 6 was a dry run for what we'll see in 2024, we need an inspirational and generational candidate to fight back. Democrats need AOC to meet this historic moment.

The country needs a fresh start. We need someone who can inspire us but also look to heal some of our wounds. Most importantly, the country needs a president who never wanted to be president. I don't necessarily agree with everything the congresswoman believes, that's called healthy dialogue. But what I believe is that when no one is looking, she'd do what's right for the country, not what's right for her bank account.

There is no denying that AOC would boost GOP turnout as a result of coverage on right wing networks built to scare elderly white voters. But she would electrify the party's base, turn out the youth at record levels and bring the party together by acknowledging the threat posed by electing Trump Republicans.

In the age of social media and quick sound bites, no Democrat is more prepared to embarrass a bully like Donald Trump or Florida governor Ron DeSantis and return some chutzpah to the Democratic Party. There will be no going high when they go low anymore. It appears the only rule is there are no rules, and AOC is ready to enter the cage and fight for our democracy.

If anyone is prepared to unify the Democratic Party and put the focus back on the working class, it's AOC. Republicans laugh, Democrats fawn, but if voters trust her, we could finally be looking at the first woman president.

It's not just Democrats that need Ocasio-Cortez to electrify a nation and ensure Trump or DeSantis doesn't find his way into the White House. We all need a leader who knows the price of gas, can tell you the cost of milk and still remembers trying to figure out how she could keep the lights on.

America doesn't belong to us, it belongs to the generations that will come after us. It is our obligation, in the face of fascism to put up a candidate who isn't just different than the Republicans, but is disgusted by Republicans and prepared to say why.

There will never be another Barack Obama, but I have a feeling we'll be saying the same about AOC. When opportunity meets preparation and history creates the moment, the cream of the crop always rises, leaving everyone else behind.

Democrats want a fighter, not a politician. They want someone who punches back and isn't afraid to say what they mean.