

**FAST FORWARD**

## **Jamaal Bowman says AIPAC funders want to ‘destroy our democracy’ in debate with primary challenger George Latimer**

Latimer also took shots at Bowman, accusing him of taking a one-sided ‘anti-Israel approach.’

By [Luke Tress](#) May 13, 2024



Rep. Jamaal Bowman, left, and challenger George Latimer, right, at a debate in White Plains, New York, May 13, 2024. (Credit: News 12)

([New York Jewish Week](#)) – In a heated debate Monday night, Rep. Jamaal Bowman attacked his primary challenger, George Latimer, over receiving funding from pro-Israel donors. Bowman also accused Israel of an “onslaught against innocent civilians.”

Latimer staked out a centrist pro-Israel position, demanding the release of hostages held by Hamas as part of a ceasefire, and condemning some chants by

pro-Palestinian student protesters as hate speech. He said Palestinian terror was to blame for the conflict.


Latimer also took shots at Bowman, accusing him of taking a one-sided “anti-Israel approach.”

The debate was the first of the closely-watched Democratic primary in New York’s 16th district, and saw the two candidates shouting over each other while disagreeing on the Israel-Hamas war as well as domestic issues.

**Jacob N. Kornbluh** · May 13, 2024  
@jacobkornbluh · Follow

#NY16 Rep. Jamaal Bowman debated his primary challenger Westchester CE George Latimer on News12.

Below is part #1 on the two-state solution and whether “from the river to the sea” chanted at campus protests is hate speech




**Jacob N. Kornbluh**  
@jacobkornbluh · Follow

#2 things got heated 30 mins into debate.

Here Bowman and Latimer in bitter exchange over AIPAC money

Latimer: AIPAC backs me and majority of CBC because we support Israel.



9:48 PM · May 13, 2024

133 Reply Share this post

Read 16 replies

The district covers southern Westchester County, where Latimer serves as county executive, and a sliver of the Bronx. The debate, held in White Plains, took place in front of a studio audience and was hosted by the local News 12 channel.

The race in a blue district is seen as a bellwether for Democrats, as centrists and progressives in the party have split over the Israel-Hamas war.

The war has emerged as a focal point in the race: Bowman has aligned himself with Israel's most vehement critics in the party, accusing Israel of "genocide," calling for the U.S. to curb weapons shipments to Israel — and alienating large parts of the district's sizable Jewish population.

He angered Jewish voters early in the war by urging [a ceasefire](#) on Oct. 16 in a statement that did not mention Hamas, terrorism or Israeli hostages. The liberal Israel lobby J Street [rescinded its endorsement](#) of Bowman in January over his rhetoric on the war.

Latimer has taken a vocally pro-Israel stance that aligns with President Joe Biden and more moderate Democrats. He supports aid to Israel and has [focused his criticism on Hamas](#). He visited Israel in November on a trip organized by the Westchester Jewish Council.

Bowman repeatedly attacked Latimer for receiving funding from the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC, which Bowman tied to the far-right.

"You're the number-one recipient of AIPAC money in the country. AIPAC is funded by right-wing Republicans who want to destroy our democracy," Bowman said in a heated exchange.

"My opponent is in the pocket and bought and paid for by AIPAC," Bowman said later, in his closing remarks.

Latimer said the American Israel Public Affairs Committee focuses on "one particular policy area, support of Israel." Referring to Bowman, Latimer said, "He does not support Israel."

In another exchange, when asked by a college protester about aid to countries "involved in human rights violations," Bowman said the campus protests were "related to U.S. tax dollars going to Israel as they bomb civilians in Gaza."

Bowman said, “My opponent is standing with Benjamin Netanyahu in continuing the onslaught on innocent civilians in Gaza.”

Latimer responded, “I don’t stand with Benjamin Netanyahu, I stand with the hostage families.”

He added, “Those people should have their hostages returned. That’s an essential part of what has to happen.”

Bowman, who backs an immediate ceasefire, interrupted, saying he had also called for the hostages’ release.

“You can call for it all you want. You have to make it part of the deal,” Latimer said, adding that calling for the release of hostages was irrelevant “when you call for an immediate ceasefire.”

At another point, Latimer said, “Any future for peace begins with the release of the hostages or the remains of the hostages and from that point forward humanitarian aid, the cessation of hostilities makes sense.”

Bowman made some nods toward mainstream party positions, voicing support for a two-state solution and Israel’s right to exist, and condemning Hamas.

Latimer made similar statements, but put the blame for the conflict squarely on Hamas.

“It takes both sides to be committed to peace. Hamas on Oct. 7 went over that borderline, viciously murdered people,” he said.

“The Israeli people need to see that they have a partner in peace and they don’t see a partner for peace right now,” Latimer added.

Bowman defended the student protesters, saying he had met with pro-Palestinian demonstrators and pro-Israel students at Columbia University and that the protests were peaceful — an assertion disputed by Jewish students and organizations who say they targeted Jews and created a hostile atmosphere.

Bowman added that he did not consider the phrase “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” hate speech, while Latimer said it was hateful and was a call for “the eradication of the Jewish population” from Israel.

The two candidates also sparred over domestic issues including affordable housing, infrastructure, abortion and immigration. Latimer repeatedly portrayed Bowman as a self-promoter more interested in making speeches than enacting policy, and Bowman accused his opponent of siding against minorities and the working class.

Bowman also accused Latimer of racism after the challenger said legislators need to work with others, “not preach and scream at them.”

“The angry Black man. It’s the Southern strategy in the north,” Bowman shouted back.

Bowman has reached out to Jewish voters. In November, he [held a meeting](#) with Jewish constituents focused on antisemitism. He split from the Democratic Socialists of America in 2021 by [supporting funding for Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system](#).

Bowman has also been embroiled in a series of scandals in recent months. In October, he pulled a fire alarm at the Capitol, earning [a formal censure](#) from the House. Blog posts he wrote more than a decade ago referring to 9/11 conspiracy theories [surfaced](#) in January. Last week, the Daily Beast [reported](#) that his YouTube page followed accounts peddling in conspiracy theories. And in January [he apologized](#) for publicly praising the anti-Israel academic Norman Finkelstein.

In 2020 Bowman unseated Eliot Engel, a pro-Israel Jewish Democrat. He became part of the so-called “Squad” of progressives that includes other harsh critics of Israel.

Latimer, a centrist Democrat, has raised more money than Bowman, pulling in [\\$3.6 million](#) as of the end of March, compared to Bowman’s [\\$2.6 million](#).

Latimer has also won support from the Democratic Majority for Israel, the [Jewish Democratic Council of America](#) and AIPAC, which encouraged him to run against Bowman. Bowman was [endorsed](#) by the House Democratic leadership.

This article [originally appeared](#) on JTA.org.