

POLITICS

Leaked records show Democrats lined up behind UM board challenger



Craig Mauger

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Lansing — A Democratic candidate for a seat on the University of Michigan Board of Regents whose [social media posts about Israel drew a backlash](#) from some top state Democrats won his April 19 convention race in overwhelming fashion, according to internal voting records obtained by The Detroit News.

The unofficial numbers collected by the Michigan Democratic Party showed, on average, nearly two out of every three of the 6,500 party members who voted in the race for two seats on the UM board supported lawyer Amir Makled. High-ranking state and congressional officials supported the two incumbents over Makled.

At the convention, Makled, an Arab-American attorney based in Dearborn, effectively unseated Democratic incumbent regent Jordan Acker, a lawyer who's Jewish and [had been targeted by pro-Palestinian demonstrators](#) who wanted the university to divest from its endowment companies contributing to Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

Another Democratic incumbent, Paul Brown, got about 44% of the vote. Makled got about 40%, beating Acker, who received about 15%, according to unofficial results of how each participant voted, obtained by The News.

State Rep. Mai Xiong, D-Warren, was among the Michigan Democrats who supported Makled on April 19.

"I voted for Amir Makled because he came to my community, listened to local concerns and made a clear case for how he would serve students, faculty, staff and workers across all three University of Michigan campuses," Xiong said Tuesday.

The convention results underscored the lingering and vocal frustration among some Michigan Democrats toward the federal government's support of Israel's military operations in Iran and Lebanon, less than four months before the August primary election.

Makled [represented several UM students](#) who faced charges after protests calling on UM to divest from weapons manufacturing and Israel. Previously, he shared and then deleted social media posts praising members of [Hezbollah](#), an Iran-backed military organization based in Lebanon that has been designated a [terrorist group](#) by the U.S. Department of State.

Another post Makled shared last year said Republican former U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia was clearer "about genocide than 99% of Democrats."

Makled recently told MLive that criticism of his social media reposts mischaracterized his criticism of Israel.

"The only mistake that I made was deleting them, because they want me looking at tweets and they want the public looking at tweets because they don't want you looking at tuition, labor, free speech, civil rights and who the University of Michigan actually deserves," [Makled told MLive](#).

Makled's social media posts were slammed by high-profile Michigan Democrats before the convention.

Brandon Dillon, a former party chairman, said Makled's posts reflected "a pattern of extremism and bigotry." Likewise, U.S. Sen. Elissa Slotkin, D-Holly, denounced Makled's posts, according to the publication Jewish Insider.

"I'm going to have a problem with any candidate — Democrat, Republican or independent — who shares antisemitic and hateful posts on social media," Slotkin said, according to [Jewish Insider](#).

Convention delegates heavily backed Makled

However, voting records from the April 19 convention showed most party members in attendance didn't see Makled the same way.

About 4,200 of the attendees voted for Makled for one of their two University of Michigan Board of Regents nominations, according to the unofficial voting file.

The internal voting records obtained by The News reveal how every credentialed delegate at the state convention voted in individual races. Under the state constitution, the convention of party activists is held in lieu of a primary election to nominate candidates for attorney general, secretary of state and the governing boards of UM, Michigan State University and Wayne State.

Acker, a lawyer from Huntington Woods who was endorsed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, got votes from about 1,600 attendees.

Among those who backed Makled, according to the file, were Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit, who became the party's endorsed candidate for attorney general at the convention, and Shawn Fain, president of the United Auto Workers.

Savit didn't respond to a request for comment about his vote. A spokeswoman for the UAW didn't respond to a request about Fain's vote.

Two days before the convention, [The Guardian reported](#) that Acker appeared to have made obscene sexual comments about a Democratic strategist and lewd comments about a female UM student in Slack messages. Acker, when previously asked about the messages [by The News](#), said the allegations were "ridiculous" and "fake." The Board of Regents has hired an out-of-state law firm [to investigate the messages](#).

Acker and Brown told members of the Michigan Democratic Party's Jewish Caucus at the convention that Acker had been targeted in his role as regent and in the nomination race because he was Jewish. Brown described Acker's faith as the "elephant in the room."

How Michigan lawmakers voted on UM candidates

The News analyzed the voting records of the members of Congress and the state Legislature who attended the convention.

Among those elected officials, Brown won 35 votes and Acker got 25 votes, while Makled received only 12 votes, according to the results file.

Adrian Hemond, a Michigan political consultant, said the elected officials know what it takes to win elections.

"They don't think he has what it takes," Hemond, CEO of the firm Grassroots Midwest, said about Makled.

Among nine state senators who voted in the race at the convention, only Sen. Sylvia Santana, D-Detroit, who was running for a seat on the Michigan State University Board of Trustees, voted for Makled, according to the records. Santana didn't respond to calls seeking comment.

Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks of Grand Rapids voted for Brown and Acker.

Likewise, U.S. Rep. Kristen McDonald Rivet of Bay City supported Brown and Acker. The other U.S. House member in attendance, Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Detroit, backed only Makled, the records show.

After the convention, McDonald Rivet posted [a series of tweets online](#) about the gathering. Without mentioning Makled by name, she said the party had nominated some individuals with "extreme positions" like calling Hezbollah leaders "martyrs."

Those positions "are out of step with my values and those of Democrats across our state," Rivet added.

Tlaib endorsed Makled before the convention, saying he had "represented University of Michigan students who were vilified, targeted and criminalized for their speech."

"Our right to dissent is critical and when students are organizing for justice for Palestinians or protesting for Black Lives or against ICE, we should never allow any university to target them," Tlaib said in a social media post. "The constitutional rights of students don't stop when they enter university property. That's not how it works."

cmauger@detroitnews.com

Staff Writers Beth LeBlanc and Sarah Atwood contributed.