

2024-3-27

GTK

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

Why I'm ditching DeGette and backing Wanda James

BY ROGER SHERMAN

GUEST COMMENTARY

I have spent decades working in Denver politics and been involved in many of the policy and development conversations that shape our city. I also have worked extensively with community organizations supporting survivors of domestic violence, and I have championed initiatives that have improved our quality of life and strengthened our neighborhoods.

Because of that experience, I pay close attention when political moments reveal something deeper about the mood of a district. Recently it has become clear that many residents feel a growing disconnect from their long-standing representative in Washington.

Congresswoman Diana DeGette has served this district for decades. Longevity in office can bring valuable experience, but it also can create distance from the community's current realities. An increasing number of voters feel that their needs and concerns are no longer represented adequately. This frustration is not just anecdotal; a small poll conducted by SearchLight Research for Wanda James' campaign shows that only about 27% of likely Democratic primary voters would support DeGette if the election were held today. That poll is a stark indicator of shifting attitudes.

Given DeGette's recent performance at the Democrats' Denver County assembly, where she barely garnered enough votes to make it onto the ballot for the June primary, it would seem the poll was a stark indicator of shifting attitudes.

The message is loud and clear: many in the district believe their representative is out of touch with the energy, diversity and urgency of Denver today. DeGette's focus on federal issues has come at the expense of addressing the specific needs and concerns of Denver residents. Issues such as housing affordability, economic opportunity and federal investments in local communities are more pressing than ever — yet many feel these concerns are not being prioritized or addressed effectively at the federal level.

Amid this landscape, a new leadership voice is emerging — someone who is actively engaged with the community and truly understands the district's evolving needs. That person is Wanda James. Instead of engaging in political spectacle or internal party battles, she has focused on building a broad coalition of support across Denver's diverse communities. Business leaders, women, Black and Latino community members, LGBTQ advocates, veterans, small business owners and community organizers are rallying around her.

Support for Wanda James isn't accidental. People have seen her consistently show up for years — advocating for fairness, opportunity and economic growth. They've watched her participate in conversations that matter to their lives and work tirelessly to bring people together to find solutions.

For example, as a regent for the University of Colorado, James led efforts to reform the procurement system, making it more accessible and equitable so that local, women- and minority-owned businesses can achieve meaningful growth and equal opportunities in the procurement process. She also has fought to allow state university workers to bargain collectively. Wanda James is not someone who sits quietly on the sidelines. When issues affecting Denver communities arise, she steps forward — speaking out, working with others and pushing for meaningful change.

Denver has changed dramatically over the past decade. It's more diverse, more entrepreneurial and more outspoken about its challenges. The city's residents want a leader in Congress who reflects that vitality — someone active, visible and deeply connected to the people they serve.

The disconnect between Washington and Denver's communities is no longer sustainable. People are hungry for representation that understands their daily struggles and offers real solutions. From where I sit, Wanda James embodies that kind of leadership. She brings credibility, a broad coalition of support, and a willingness to engage directly with the district's diverse voices.

The message is clear: Denver is ready for a representative who shows up — not just when seeking office, but every day, in every community. It's time for new leadership to emerge that truly reflects the energy and urgency of Denver today.

Roger Sherman is a former partner at CRL Associates, a leading government relations, public affairs and strategic communications firm in Denver. Over the past 20 years, he has played leadership roles in numerous local ballot measure campaigns that have transformed the metro area. He served on the board of SafeHouse Denver for nine years, including two years as board chairman, supporting victims of domestic violence and their children.