

# **SUE ALTMAN’S REJECTION OF REPARATIONS, ATTACK ON ADAM HAMAWY, AND PRO-WAR POLITICS SHOW SHE IS OUT OF STEP WITH PROGRESSIVE VALUES**

**By Dr. Sadaf Jaffer and Minister Elorm Ocansey**

On the eve of his death, Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. stood in Memphis as a witness. The speech we remember as “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” was a warning. Dr. King spoke of wages withheld, of labor exploited, of systems that consumed Black bodies and called it order. He spoke of a people who had been given a check marked “insufficient funds,” and he dared to say what too many still refuse to say: justice requires repayment. The Promised Land Dr. King saw was not symbolic. It was material. It was economic. It was reparative. New Jersey, for all its progressive language, is not innocent in this story. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, through the work of the New Jersey Reparations Council, has laid before us a document that reads less like a report and more like a reckoning. Page after page, it testifies: That slavery here was not distant, but deliberate. That segregation was not accidental, but engineered. That the racial wealth gap is not unfortunate, but designed.

Yet, in New Jersey’s 12th Congressional District, we are witnessing something both familiar and offensive: a candidate who has waved away reparations as impractical and turned up her nose at the very notion of a national apology backed by material repair.

Sue Altman wants voters to see her as a progressive, but her stances on reparations, policing, and her recent attack on fellow NJ-12 candidate Dr. Adam Hamawy reveal a candidate out of touch with the moral moment in terms of racial justice and the urgent need for U.S. policy change in the Middle East. Her stances are out of step with Democratic voters, who expect policymakers to stand up for immigrant rights, racial justice, and oppose US support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

Altman is seeking to succeed Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman in New Jersey’s 12th Congressional District after previously running in the neighboring 7th District. She has been described as recalibrating her positions now that she is running in a safer, more Democratic district. This should prompt voters to ask questions about her true stances and convictions. Unfortunately, she maintains a pattern of treating the perspectives of minorities as an afterthought. In contrast, progressive values should include opposition to racism, imperialism, and a belief that the lives of all children carry the same value.

On many issues of crucial importance to progressives, her policies have been inconsistent and disappointing. She once tweeted in favor of a reparations task force in New Jersey but later gave a thumbs down when asked during a debate whether “congress should consider granting some form of reparations as part of a national apology for the practice of slavery.” Similarly, after tweeting #defundthepolice, she backtracked, stating “When I wrote the hashtag, which I do regret because I think what I’ve learned in the subsequent four or five years is that it caused a lot of harm, I was moved by that movement emotionally.”

Another clear example of Altman’s divergence from progressive values is her recent attack on Hamawy, an Arab American physician, veteran, and trauma surgeon who treated patients in Gaza and has earned early support in the race. Altman accused him of “cheerleading and wishing for the deaths of Israeli children” and said, “I am not for recreating the dark and violent dynamics of the Middle East in our Democratic primaries.” Invoking “the dark and violent dynamics of the Middle East” to describe an Arab American rival’s politics suggests that the region is uniquely barbaric, and that those connected to it are importing violence rather than participating in legitimate democratic debate.

Altman’s attacks are especially striking because Hamawy’s position is not fringe. He is running as a progressive in one of the safest Democratic seats in New Jersey, and his campaign has drawn support from voters frustrated with the party establishment’s approach to Gaza. Hamawy’s stance that the U.S. should not provide any military aid to Israel is held by numerous prominent Democrats, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders. Whether one agrees with him or not, opposing more U.S. military aid to Israel is part of mainstream Democratic debate.

In fact, Altman’s accusations seem to be a projection of her own record on Israel-Palestine and the Middle East. In 2024, Altman ran in her home district of NJ-7 on a clearly pro-Israel platform. She supported Congressman Josh Gottheimer’s efforts to supply billions of dollars in US weapons to Israel and was endorsed by Democratic Majority for Israel. Tom Moran noted in his NJ.com column that she “supports every weapons shipment” to Israel and shares a hardline view of the war.

Altman's campaign produced a policy paper that reflected a callous disregard for the lives of Palestinian, Lebanese, and Iranian children killed by U.S. and Israeli weapons, while reinforcing a narrative in which Israeli policy takes precedence over all else. She states in her policy paper, "I opposed BDS throughout my career," referring to the effort of activists to divest from Israel, one of the main forms of activism that were used to overcome apartheid in South Africa. Additionally, rather than support the free speech rights of students protesting genocide on college campuses, Altman maligned them as antisemitic.

Months after both President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris had called for a ceasefire, Altman still said "I'm really, really, really not comfortable with a unilateral ceasefire." Refusing to back a ceasefire that late in the carnage was a deliberate choice to remain to the right of even the administration she was ostensibly aligned with on other issues.

Her positions on Iran are also troubling. In the October 2024 NJ-7 debate, she stated "I think there could be a case made for a 'preemptive' strike on Iran." This is the same logic used by President Trump to bomb Iran which has led to the murder of thousands of Iranian civilians including hundreds of children who were killed in the Minab school bombing on the very first day of the bombings this year. Altman's worldview sanitizes the consequences of U.S. bombings, particularly for non-White people. When Dr. King said he had been to the Mountaintop. He saw something many still refuse to see: That justice is not inevitable. It must be enacted. That dignity is not granted. It must be secured. That the Promised Land is not reached by memory alone, but by movement, by courage, by costly obedience to what is right.

Sue Altman may still want the progressive label, but on Reparations, on Palestine, on Iran, and now in her attack on Adam Hamawy, she has shown that she has not earned it. We deserve better.

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## **About the Authors**

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