



Cori Bush, a Democratic lawmaker from Missouri with a background in activism, outside the Capitol on Tuesday. AMANDA ANDRADE-RHOADES/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By
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WASHINGTON—President Biden insisted that the only way to extend an expiring eviction moratorium was for Congress to pass a new law. House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D., Calif.) said that the only way was through the executive branch.

Then Rep. Cori Bush (D., Mo.), in office just seven months, stepped in. Frustrated that the House had adjourned late Friday for a long break without trying to extend the moratorium, Ms. Bush made a decision in the moment. She put a chair on the steps outside the Capitol and began a nearly round-the-clock sit-in—sleeping there some nights. By the fifth day, the Biden administration had reversed course and [issued a new moratorium](#) covering most of the country until Oct. 3.

“Am I supposed to just go home? No,” said Ms. Bush, who said she has been evicted herself three times. “I’m an organizer. I’m an activist. That is what I do. I fell back on what I know to do, which was be visible, put your body on the line, use whatever you have.”

The moratorium might not stand. Mr. Biden said he wasn’t sure if it would pass constitutional muster, and a group of property managers and Realtors [filed a motion late Wednesday to block it](#). Republicans called it overreach by the administration and said the ban was of dubious legality. But the gambit marked a breakthrough moment for the 45-year-old first-term congresswoman and a rare occasion when a lawmaker’s protest has changed policy in Washington, even if it proves fleeting.

“Rep. Cori Bush gets huge credit,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) said Thursday on the Senate floor. “One person who changed things for tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people.”



Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, center, joined Rep. Cori Bush in front of the Capitol on Tuesday.

PHOTO: DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES

Ms. Bush said she would keep her focus on evictions and getting \$46.5 billion in rental assistance funds, [most of which is unused](#), distributed to tenants and landlords. She also reiterated her support for defunding the police and shifting funds to the social safety net [in an interview with CBS News](#), while rejecting GOP criticism of her own spending on personal security, citing multiple threats to her safety.

The Republican National Committee, in a statement, said, “Democrat philosophy made plain: ‘Police for me, but not for thee.’ ”

Her progressive colleagues, who have faced setbacks on issues like the minimum wage and ending the Senate filibuster, indicated that their next target would be persuading Mr. Biden to extend a student-loan payment moratorium and cancel student debt, an area where he [has expressed caution](#).

Ms. Bush, whose father is an alderman and former mayor of a small city outside St. Louis, developed her own political skills in the crucible of Ferguson, Mo. She marched at night to protest the police killing of Michael Brown, becoming a leading Black Lives Matter organizer, and during the day worked as a nursing supervisor, an aide said. She lost Democratic primaries—one in 2016 for the Senate and one in 2018 for the House—[before beating](#) long-serving Rep. William Lacy Clay (D., Mo.) in 2020 for the safely Democratic House seat.

Since joining Congress, she has aligned herself with “the squad,” a group of outspoken House progressives including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D., N.Y.) who have at times tangled with their own party leaders.



The Biden administration issued a new eviction moratorium, responding to pressure from progressive Democrats. WSJ's Gerald F. Seib explains how this friction exposed a rift between the White House and some Democrats that could affect future legislation. Photo illustration: Adam Falk

Shortly before Ms. Bush set up camp on the Capitol steps Friday, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez joined her that evening in a race to the House floor as part of a futile attempt to force the House into a roll-call vote on extending the federal evictions ban. Over the weekend, with Congress by then on recess, Ms. Bush urged Mrs. Pelosi to call the House back into session.

The speaker said that it was up to the White House to act. In a meeting on Thursday, Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Schumer told the president he needed to extend the moratorium through administrative action because Congress lacked the votes to pass an extension, according to a person familiar with the matter. The White House said it lacked legal authority to act unilaterally.



Rep. Cori Bush, in blue, celebrated the guilty verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial in April with other lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

PHOTO: BILL CLARK/CQ ROLL CALL/ZUMA PRESS

Ms. Bush and other progressives argued that while the Supreme Court may have foreclosed a further extension of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention moratorium, as the White House had argued, the resurgence of Covid-19 cases meant that the administration should make a new case. At her demonstration, Ms. Bush described how she was evicted and spent three months living with her two children and her partner out of her car in St. Louis.

Over several days, more prominent figures joined the protest on the House steps, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.), Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D., Texas) and civil-rights leader Jesse Jackson. At a press conference on Tuesday, a group of Black pastors said that they planned to stage sit-ins around the country.

By Monday, Ms. Bush turned her focus squarely on the White House, which said it had worked over the weekend on any legal avenues forward but hadn't succeeded so far.

Waiting outside the Capitol on the House steps, Ms. Bush's team noticed Capitol Police tightening security, and an officer said that Vice President Kamala Harris was on her way to the Senate.



Rep. Cori Bush and other Democratic representatives protested the expiration of the eviction moratorium outside the Capitol on Sunday.

PHOTO: STEFANI REYNOLDS/BLOOMBERG NEWS

Ms. Bush ran to the Senate to look for Ms. Harris, who was meeting on a separate matter with the daughters of former President Lyndon B. Johnson, according to people familiar with the matter. Ms. Bush requested a brief conversation with Ms. Harris. She agreed, and they spoke.

“I wanted her to look me in my eyes, and I wanted to look in hers, but I wanted her to see down to my soul what pain looks like,” Ms. Bush said.

Ms. Harris's office confirmed that they had a brief conversation.

Ms. Bush also stopped by Mr. Schumer's office to ask for a meeting. Later, he met with Ms. Bush and told her he was pushing the White House to extend the moratorium. Ms. Bush viewed Mr. Schumer's presence as an important element of the campaign.

"It was a demonstration to leadership at the executive and White House levels that this wasn't just a stunt," a Bush aide said.

As attention to Ms. Bush's sit-in grew, Mrs. Pelosi issued a statement Tuesday morning praising her. That afternoon, Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Schumer received a phone call from the chiefs of the CDC and the Health and Human Services Department outlining the new moratorium that would be announced, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Outside the Capitol, Ms. Bush huddled with Ms. Ocasio-Cortez and fellow progressives Reps. Jimmy Gomez (D., Calif.) and Mondaire Jones (D., N.Y.). Clustered around the phone of Ms. Bush's chief of staff, they were briefed by the White House on their plan. The CDC would announce a new moratorium, more narrowly focused on areas experiencing major outbreaks but still covering most Americans—rather than extend the old one.

As the news started to break, Mr. Schumer bounded over from the Senate to congratulate Ms. Bush, and she and her colleagues celebrated.

The White House was more guarded in its praise. Asked Wednesday about Ms. Bush's influence, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said "her advocacy and her passion" was moving to many Democrats but highlighted calls between Mr. Biden and Mrs. Pelosi as critical to the White House's decision to issue a new moratorium.

Cori Bush slept outside the Capitol to protest evictions. Democrats credited her for the renewed protections.

By
Jaclyn Peiser
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Washington Post



Wind whipped along the steps of the U.S. Capitol on Sunday night as rain pattered, slowly soaking Rep. Cori Bush's sleeping bag. She struggled to get warm — a familiar feeling, [she said](#). Two decades earlier, the Missouri Democrat, who then lived in her car, spent sleepless nights shivering as she held her two young children in her arms.

This time, Bush chose to brave the elements. For three nights, she slept outside the Capitol, joining activists and fellow Democratic lawmakers protesting the lapse in the federal eviction

moratorium, which had protected renters during the pandemic. The move drew national attention, forcing the White House to respond to Bush's demands to temporarily halt evictions after Congress went on recess without addressing the issue.

On Tuesday, Bush's campaign succeeded.

The Biden administration [announced a 60-day eviction ban](#) for U.S. counties with "substantial and high levels of community transmission," according to a [news release](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With the virus's delta variant quickly spreading throughout the United States, renters in about 90 percent of the country qualify for the new moratorium, Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a statement. Bush wiped away tears as she shared the news of the renewed protections, which run through Oct. 3, with activists sitting on the Capitol steps.

"We just did the work — just by loving folks — to keep millions in their homes," she said. Democrats and civil rights activists are praising Bush for leading the five-day protest. Some noted that by evoking her own experiences with housing insecurity, Bush forced fellow lawmakers to understand the realities of eviction.

"Thank you to everyone who kept a spotlight on this — particularly [Cori Bush] who understands what it's like to lose your home and turned passion into action," [Schumer tweeted](#) Tuesday.

In the days leading up to the CDC's announcement, tensions mounted [between the White House and left-leaning lawmakers](#) who grew angry after the president resisted an extension. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), who declined to reconvene the House to address the moratorium's Saturday expiration, pushed the Biden administration to extend the ban.

But the administration resisted the move because it may prove unconstitutional, noting that the original moratorium was [barely approved by the Supreme Court in June](#).

Conservative Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, who joined the liberal justices in upholding the CDC's emergency order through the end of July, wrote that it wasn't worth it to stop the eviction ban, given it was ending a month later. He added that he believed any further extension would require congressional approval.

President Biden noted that despite the likely court challenge, the extension will give the administration time to disburse rental assistance. Congress approved a [total](#) of \$46 billion in emergency funds in December and February to help tenants pay their rent, but the process to give out the money has been [painfully slow](#).

Bush, who was elected in 2020 after she [gained national attention](#) for her work as a Black Lives Matter organizer in and around Ferguson, Mo., began camping outside the Capitol on Friday after the House adjourned. She invited Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) to join her.

Activists and other Democrats also gathered on the steps, including Reps. Ayanna Pressley (Mass.), Ilhan Omar (Minn.) and Jimmy Gomez (Calif.).

Bush quickly became the face of the protest. For five days she posted on social media, pressuring Democrats in the House and the White House to act.

Her efforts proved effective — the CDC announced the 60-day extension Tuesday afternoon. Tearful celebrations and praise for Bush followed.

You did this,” Schumer said as he [embraced Bush and Ocasio-Cortez](#) outside the Capitol. “You guys are fabulous.”

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), who joined the protest over the weekend, ran up to Bush and hugged her.

“I used to ask myself a question: ‘Does it matter that I’m here instead of somebody else?’ And you’ve now answered that question. It matters that you’re here, not someone else,” Warren said to Bush in [video](#) captured by NBC News.

Despite the attention, Bush noted in a news conference Tuesday evening that she was not alone in pushing for change.

“This is not ‘The Cori Show,’” [she said](#). “This is a group of people who just love people and know that it’s our work as humans, regardless of title ... to end human suffering.”

Later, standing before a group of activists on the steps of the Capitol, Bush beamed. She accepted the CDC’s announcement as proof that activism works, despite the possibility the extension could be challenged.

“You don’t have to have a big name and a big title. You don’t have to have big money,” Bush said. “But big courage takes you a long way. Big purpose takes you a long way.”

“There is a new fire in every single person that’s out here right now,” she added. “You’ve got to share it because that’s how we change our world.”

With Capitol Sit-In, Cori Bush Galvanized a Progressive Revolt Over Evictions



By Nicholas Fandos

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WASHINGTON — Representative Cori Bush of Missouri was 20 the first time she was evicted, tossed out by a landlord after a violent fight with her boyfriend.

The next time, she was 29 and had quit a low-wage job to attend nursing school, and could no longer afford her rent.

It happened a third time in 2015, as Ms. Bush threw herself into the protest movement in Ferguson, Mo., after a [white police officer shot and killed Michael Brown](#), a Black teenager. The

eviction notice was waiting on her door one night — prompted, she said, by neighbors who feared she would bring the unrest home with her.

So when it became clear on Friday night that neither Congress nor the White House was going to act to stop a pandemic-era federal eviction moratorium from expiring, leaving hundreds of thousands of low-income Americans at risk of losing their homes, Ms. Bush — now 45 and a first-term Democratic congresswoman from St. Louis — felt a familiar flood of anxiety and a flash of purpose.

As her colleagues boarded planes home for a seven-week summer recess, she took a page from her years as an activist and did the only thing she could think of: She got an orange sleeping bag, grabbed a lawn chair and began what turned into a round-the-clock sit-in on the steps of the United States Capitol that galvanized a full-on progressive revolt.

She stayed put — in rain, cold and brutal summer heat — until Tuesday, when President Biden, under growing pressure from Ms. Bush’s group and Speaker Nancy Pelosi, abruptly relented and [announced a new, 60-day federal eviction moratorium](#) covering [areas overrun with the Delta variant of the coronavirus](#). Even as Mr. Biden reiterated his administration’s fears that the ban would run afoul of the courts, it was a striking reversal for his team, designed to give state and local governments time to distribute billions of dollars in federal rental assistance that has yet to go out the door.

“My brain could not understand how we were supposed to just leave,” Ms. Bush said in an interview on Wednesday, recounting the months she spent 20 years ago living out of a 1996 Ford Explorer. “I felt like I did sitting in that car — like, ‘Who speaks for me? Is this because I deserve it?’”

Furious that the White House had tried to punt the political mess to Congress, Ms. Pelosi had been forcefully waging a battle of her own, quietly working the levers of power available to influential political operators in Washington. She spoke to Mr. Biden directly and issued uncompromising statements urging him to use executive authority to extend the moratorium unilaterally, despite the risk of an adverse court ruling. Congress, she said, simply did not have the votes to solve the problem.

But it was Ms. Bush, using the tactics of a street organizer — alongside fellow progressives like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, who joined her encampment — who thrust the issue into the national consciousness and refused to let it go. They marshaled huge social media followings, the attention of a news media eager to cover intraparty conflict and direct confrontations with party leaders to all but shame them into finding a solution.

Their success has sent a bolt of energy through the progressive movement that Ms. Bush and others now hope will signal the start of a new, more assertive phase in Washington. It comes as liberals are reeling from the latest in a string of electoral defeats after [Nina Turner, a progressive](#)

[insurgent](#), [lost a special-election primary in Cleveland on Tuesday](#) to an establishment-backed candidate, Shontel Brown.

Though Democrats' spare majorities in the House and Senate give the bloc the power to make or break legislation, they have so far mostly hesitated to use it, watching instead with frustration as Mr. Biden's drive to strike a bipartisan infrastructure deal with moderates has pushed their priorities — from voting rights to climate change — to the back burner.

"I hope people see right now that I mean what I say," Ms. Bush said. "Hopefully, this has shown not only leadership, the caucus, but our progressive family that when we say we are not going to back down, we don't back down. And when we say our communities need this particular thing, we can stand together to work together to get it."



Ms. Bush held a round-the-clock sit-in on the steps of the United States Capitol that galvanized a full-on progressive revolt. Credit...Stefani Reynolds for The New York Times

The victory could be fleeting; even Mr. Biden conceded that most constitutional scholars believed his administration's latest eviction freeze lacked a legal basis.

And Ms. Bush's newfound prominence as a symbol of progressive might carried risks for Democrats as well. On Thursday, Republicans began circulating [a video clip of Ms. Bush](#) defending her own use of private security she said she hired because of death threats while reiterating calls to defund the police. House Republicans' campaign arm immediately spliced

Ms. Bush's words into advertisements targeting vulnerable Democrats up for re-election next fall, using them to tie the party to a rise in violent crime.

Still, for now, the eviction fight has offered a welcome taste of vindication for Ms. Bush, who has faced doubts and criticisms from some in her party ever since she [unexpectedly upset](#) a moderate 10-term Democratic incumbent in a primary one year ago this week in a campaign promising to bring her zeal for activism to Congress.

Her opponent then, William Lacy Clay Jr., tried to weaponize Ms. Bush's patchy work history and financial woes, reminding voters of her evictions and that she had struggled to hold down a job. His message was clear: She lacked the kind of experience needed to make a difference in Congress and could not be trusted with public office.

Her critics on the left and right similarly scoffed in recent days at her protest, calling it naïve. Conservative Twitter delighted in making jokes about the unruly sleepover scene on the Capitol's marble steps. One commentator, Ben Shapiro, [called it](#) "unbelievably off-putting and stupid."

Even fellow liberals who shared her goal questioned Ms. Bush's hard-nosed tactics, which they privately grouched were inappropriate and ineffective for a member of Congress. The liberal editorial board of her hometown newspaper, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, [wrote on Tuesday](#) that Ms. Bush "clearly misunderstands the complicated process required to restore the moratorium."

But many of Ms. Bush's colleagues, including some high-profile Democrats, saw a political moment in the making.

Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont was there on Monday, grinning with his arms around Ms. Bush and Ms. Ocasio-Cortez. Representative Joyce Beatty of Ohio, the chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus who has been critical of progressives like Ms. Bush challenging Black incumbents like Mr. Clay, flew back from Ohio to pay a visit after Ms. Bush called to invite her personally. Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the majority leader who is angling to fend off a progressive challenger as he seeks re-election next year, came by twice.

When an aide to Ms. Bush learned from Capitol Police that Vice President Kamala Harris would be in the Senate on Monday, Ms. Bush took off running from the House steps in pursuit.

"I wanted to look her in her eyes," Ms. Bush said. "I wanted her to look me in mine and see down to my soul everything that was happening on the inside of me — to see St. Louis, to see the pain of regular people."

Kayla Reed, a St. Louis organizer who met Ms. Bush around the demonstrations in Ferguson, said she could draw a direct line from those early protests to the congresswoman's impatient, insurgent style of politics Ms. Bush, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez and others are now using to test the mettle of their party.

“What she did was not allow the conversation to end at ‘Congress wasn’t able to extend it and there was no other way forward,’ ” said Ms. Reed, who now leads a group, Action St. Louis, that has been working with renters facing evictions. “She applied pressure.”

She added, “This absolutely wouldn’t have been the case with her predecessor.”

Some of Ms. Bush’s colleagues in Washington reached the same conclusion.

On Tuesday evening, before Ms. Bush could go live for a round of valedictory television hits and eventually collapse for a decent night’s sleep in her own bed, Senator Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts Democrat and progressive standard-bearer, ran up and wrapped her arms around the congresswoman.

“You know when I came here, I used to ask myself a question: ‘Does it matter that I’m here instead of someone else?’” Ms. Warren, who spent much of her career in academia, told Ms. Bush. “And you’ve now answered that question. It matters that you’re here — not someone else.”