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Bernie Sanders: Young Democrats Like to Back Vermont Senator

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WASHINGTON — When Rep. Alan Grayson, D-Fla., endorsed Sen. Bernie Sanders, D-Vt., for president on Twitter, the Florida congressman embraced his candidate's call for a "political revolution."

Grayson, a rising Florida Democrat who is running for the Senate and will be a super delegate at his party's national convention July 25-28 in Philadelphia, echoed Sanders' attacks on banks and billionaires in his endorsement announcement.

Sanders is "unbought and unbossed," asserted Grayson.

A self-identified "democratic socialist," Sanders has represented the people of his state as an independent for more than two decades in Congress. He is the son of Jewish immigrants from Poland and was born and raised in Brooklyn, where his father worked as a paint salesman.

Now age 74, Sanders has said his childhood experience with income inequality honed his political views, and over the past year, he has tapped into a deep well of resentment that has grown since the 2008 financial crisis.

His economic proposals have pushed the Democratic Party further to the left, while his stance on social issues reflects the party platform's steady support for abortion rights and same-sex "marriage."

Indeed, both Clinton and Sanders have presented themselves as staunch abortion-rights advocates, and during their March 7 town hall in Detroit, the two candidates affirmed their support for *Roe v. Wade*. One key difference on social issues, however, is Sanders' stated opposition to capital punishment.

"The state itself, in a democratic, civilized society, should itself not be involved in the murder of other Americans," argued Sanders during a Senate floor speech in October that repudiated the death penalty.

But his strong following among under-30 Democrats can be traced in part to his uncompromising call for breaking up the nation's biggest banks and for proposals that would sharply increase taxes for rich Americans and corporations.

"If we are truly serious about ending 'too big to fail,' we have got to break up the largest financial institutions in this country," said Sanders during a 2015 media interview that outlined his goal to reinstate the Glass-Steagall Act, which had prevented commercial and investment banks from merging.

"Allowing commercial banks to merge with investment banks and insurance companies in 1999 was a huge mistake," he added, arguing that the change in policy not only resulted in the taxpayer bailout of banks that failed during 2008, but also "caused millions of Americans to lose their jobs, homes, life savings."

Meanwhile, his proposals to shift financial responsibility for college tuition and health insurance to the federal government have won applause from Millennials, who often begin their working life with college-loan debt and shaky job prospects.

The Vermont senator has called for a single-payer system for health insurance — Medicare for all — while Hillary Clinton has promised to protect and improve Obamacare.

Youthful Support

At present, the Clinton campaign has dismissed Sanders' economic and social policies as unrealistic and too expensive. In contrast, she has presented herself as a "progressive Democrat" who is pragmatic about adopting reforms that will help, not overburden, middle-class Americans.

Yet Sanders' anti-establishment message has accelerated the party's move to the left, and Clinton and Democrat elders have generally downplayed this ideological shift, rather than staging a confrontation. Clinton may be picking up delegates at a faster clip, but Sanders' big win in the Michigan primary shows he is still popular with young Democrats, who also agree with his support for gun control, action on climate change and comprehensive immigration reform, which would include a path to citizenship.

"We don't see signs of Millennials breaking off from their support for Sanders," Emily Ekins, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told the Register.

According to Ekins' polling research, 70%-80% of young Democrats now back Sanders, but there is no hard data on their religious membership.

Asked to describe a typical Sanders voter, Ekins said the profile that emerged from her research pointed to "young, white males who were very liberal." Young women also support Sanders, she added, but not at the same level.

The Millennials' embrace of Sanders may shock older Americans, who recall the Cold War standoff between the U.S.-led capitalist system and Soviet-style socialism. But Ekins found that many young Democrats have no problem with a candidate who identifies as a socialist. These voters view Sanders' policy positions as more "compassionate" — something akin to the brand of socialism practiced in parts of Scandinavia.

Ekins also noted that younger Americans are less likely than their parents to be involved in institutional religion, and so they are less worried about socialist policies that might pose a threat to the freedom of religion, as was the case in the Soviet Union and in satellite nations like Poland.

Lack of Knowledge

But Ekins underscored the fact that Millennials could not easily define socialism, when asked to explain their political views and support for Sanders.

That finding did not surprise public intellectuals like George Weigel.

“I don’t know why anyone should be surprised at this, given the state of American education over the past several decades,” said Weigel, the papal biographer who recounted Pope St. John Paul II’s battle to liberate Poland from Soviet rule.

“A lot of young people, especially those who attended ‘elite’ schools, know nothing about the colossal failures of socialism; nor have they been given anything that would cause them to wonder about the propriety of Bernie Sanders honeymooning in Moscow,” he told the Register.

“The ‘social studies’ chickens are coming home to roost.”

Meanwhile, Sanders has claimed that his version of socialism mirrors the teachings of Pope Francis, whom he has described as “a socialist.”

“Well, what it means to be a socialist, in the sense of what the Pope is talking about, what I’m talking about, is to say that we have got to do our best and live our lives in a way that alleviates human suffering, that does not accelerate the disparities of income and wealth,” Sanders told Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, who leads the Salt and Light network, in a February interview that is [posted](#) on *The Washington Post* website.

During the interview, Sanders applauded Pope Francis’ “radical critique of the hypercapitalist system, world system.”

The Pope “believes that, in democratic societies, government itself should play a very strong role in protecting the most vulnerable people amongst us,” he said.

“That is a direct critique of conservative politics, and, of course, he’s going to be attacked for that.”

Faith in the State

During an interview with the Register, Sam Gregg, the director of research at the pro-free-market Acton Institute, explained the key principles that set socialism and “liberalism,” as that term was once understood, apart.

“Socialists have faith in the state to solve most problems, are generally hostile to private property and stress equality of outcome,” said Gregg.

Liberals “see private property as foundational to civilization and stress equality in the sense of equality before the law.”

Gregg added, “The Democratic Party presently allows more room for markets, but, generally, I would suggest that it is moving closer to Sen. Sanders’ positions.”

As Sanders stirs deep enthusiasm within the Democratic base, Clinton’s allies in the party have challenged the Vermont senator’s proposals and expressed doubt that the majority of Americans would vote for a socialist.

“I haven’t yet seen anyone add up the cost of all of Sanders’ proposals, but he is clearly talking about tax increases that have no historical precedent in peacetime,” warned Paul Starr, a public-policy expert at Princeton University, who worked on health-care issues in the Clinton administration, in a January 2016 column for *Politico*.

“Sanders says people would save money because they wouldn’t be paying for health insurance or co-pays. But he is asking Americans to have a level of trust in the efficiency of government that they do not have.”

Electability

Starr also raised concerns about Sanders’ foreign-policy credentials and expressed doubts that he could effectively serve as commander in chief, while the left-leaning *Nation* magazine endorsed the senator as a “foreign-policy realist” best suited to deal with the growing array of geopolitical crises.

That said, the Democratic base is much more concerned with economic issues than in stopping the Islamic State, the international terrorist organization.

A January 2016 NBC poll found that just 11% of Democrat respondents saw terrorism as the most important issue in the campaign.

“Fewer Democrats are concerned with terrorism than are concerned with the economy (29%), health care (17%), the environment (15%) or education (13%),” noted NBC.

Yet Democrat leaders also fear that a terrorist attack on the homeland could change voters’ priorities, increasing Sanders’ electability problem.

The Senate minority leader, Harry Reid, D-Nev., endorsed Hillary Clinton, joining a total of 40 Democratic senators who have closed ranks around their party’s front-running presidential hopeful.

“I think the middle class would be better served by Hillary,” said Reid, explaining his decision.

Sanders still has a chance to prove the minority leader and most of his other Senate colleagues wrong. But even while his youthful supporters stay the course and embrace his vision of “political revolution,” the socialist Senator from Vermont may find more doors closing in the upcoming weeks, if current primary polls prove accurate.