



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2016: PROFILE OF SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

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Personal Background:

Senator Bernie Sanders (Independent-Vermont) is the longest-serving independent politician in Congress and a surprising and unlikely candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016. He was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1990. In 2006, he won election to the US Senate. He was re-elected in 2012. Sanders serves on the Senate Committees on the Budget (Ranking Democrat); Environment and Public Works; Energy and Natural Resources; Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; and Veterans' Affairs. Sanders attended Brooklyn College and the University of Chicago.

Sanders was born on September 8, 1941 in New York to Jewish immigrants from Poland. As part of struggling immigrant working-class families, Sanders became familiar with economic disparity, the major inspiration for his politics. He counts American socialist labor leader Eugene V. Debs as an important influence on his policies. After completing college in 1964, Sanders lived on Kibbutz *Sha'ar ha'Amakim* in northern Israel. Although Sanders had a Jewish upbringing and attended Hebrew school, he considers himself a secular Jew. He downplays questions about religion. He has said he is proud to be Jewish, but is not particularly religious. After settling in Vermont in the 1970s, Sanders made several unsuccessful bids for public office as a member of the anti-war Liberty Union Party from which he resigned in 1979. In 1981 he was elected Mayor of Burlington, Vermont by a scant 12 votes. He was re-elected three more times before running for US House of Representatives in 1990.

Upon his election to the House Sanders was faced with finding political allies to advance his issues and legislation. He could not caucus with the Republicans and decided to caucus with the Democrats despite opposition from conservative Democrats. Sanders often found himself out of step with both parties and believed both adopted wrong positions. For example, he opposed the Iraq War questioning the timing of military action when the US faced a \$6 trillion national debt and growing deficit.

Sanders won election to the Senate in 2006. He gained prominence in 2010 when he engaged in an eight-hour filibuster against the extension of the Bush era tax cuts for the rich. He felt that this legislation was a bad tax agreement between the president and Republican legislators, as he later wrote in the introduction of *The Speech: A Historic Filibuster on Corporate Greed and the Decline of Our Middle Class*. Sanders ended his time on the Senate floor with a plea to his legislative colleagues to come up with a better proposal which better reflects the needs of the middle class and working families of our country and, most importantly, to the children of our country, according to a *Washington Post* article.

On April 30, 2015 Sanders announced that he would be a candidate for the presidential nomination for the Democratic Party. Knowing it would be difficult to run as an Independent, Sanders made the decision to run as a Democrat where it would be easier to get on the ballot. His decision created a serious challenge to Democratic front-runner Hillary Rodham Clinton, although back in April, Sanders was not seen as a major threat.

That changed on February 1, 2016 when Sanders held Clinton to a tie in the Iowa Caucuses, (both received 50 percent of the vote) losing to Clinton by one delegate. While Sanders is expected to win the New Hampshire primary on February 9 by a significant margin, experts think it is unlikely that he will be able to wrestle the Democratic nomination away from Clinton. Sanders, however, should not be underestimated and has said so himself. He has raised significant amounts of money in small donations, and his message continues to resonate

with the younger generation of voters, and with voters who believe they are economically disadvantaged.

Political Platform:

Sanders describes himself as a “democratic socialist” and remains loyal to his ideological convictions. His platform focuses on issues of equality in the United States. Economically, he favors tax reform that increases rates for the wealthy, greater governmental oversight of Wall Street and balancing the disparity between wages for men and women. He also believes in a state-administered health care system, more-affordable higher education and an expansion of the Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid systems. A social liberal, he also supports same-sex marriage and is pro-choice.

Wall Street Reform: If elected, Sanders is committed, in the first 100 days of his presidency, to order his Secretary of the Treasury to establish a “Too-Big-to Fail” list of commercial banks, shadow banks and insurance companies whose collapse — without a taxpayer bailout — would “pose a catastrophic risk to the United States economy.” Within 365 days, his administration would break up the institutions on that list.

Trade: Sanders opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade deal. In his view the agreement harms consumers and will cost American jobs.

Civil Liberties and Electronic surveillance: Sanders has been a strong critic of US Government surveillance policies. He voted against the USA Patriot Act and as President, he would likely seek to repeal or significantly weaken the Act. He views the National Security Agency (NSA) as out of control and operating unconstitutionally.

Role of Government: As a socialist, Sanders would support an expanded role for government, not a drastically reduced one as called for by his Republican opponents.

Immigration: Sanders believes in comprehensive immigration reform and supports creating a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in the US. He opposes the guest worker program and is skeptical of the H-1B immigrant visas. He opposes the open borders immigration policy describing it as a right-wing proposal, which says essentially there is no United States and would bring in cheap labor. The solution for Sanders is job creation in the US with a raise in wages.

Gun Control: Sanders supports banning certain semi-automatic weapons and is now in favor of instant background checks for gun owners. In the House of Representatives, Sanders voted against the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act that required federal background checks on firearm purchasers in the United States. In the US Senate Sanders voted for the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act. Sanders' opposition was due to a states' rights issue which nationally legislated waiting periods and his belief that gun manufacturers should not be held responsible if someone uses a gun to commit crimes or murder. He claims he wants real, serious debate and action on guns, no extreme positions on both sides. Gun control is a serious and divisive issue in the US. Many gun control activists do not support Sanders' position.

Bernie Sanders on the Middle East:

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Sanders views the entrenched and difficult conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as one of the most important issues in the Middle East. He acknowledges that there is no magic solution to the problem, but advocates for a two-state solution where Israel has the right to exist in security and at the same time the Palestinians have a state of their own. Sanders also believes that many other Middle East conflicts exacerbate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although Jewish, Sanders does not favor Israel over the Palestinians, nor does he let his religion guide his positions. Sanders is not a big supporter of Benjamin Netanyahu and was one of eight Senators who did not attend Netanyahu's March

2015 speech to a joint session of Congress. He sincerely believes that diplomacy, not military or economic actions, can keep Israel safe from Iran.

Syria: Sanders opposed President Obama’s decision to deploy special operation forces to Syria to help battle ISIS. Sanders opposed the Iraq war from the beginning and does not want the US sucked into a “quagmire” of which there is no end. Sanders has not hesitated to use Clinton’s vote to go to war with Iraq against her. Sanders, does however, support President Obama’s policy of airstrikes in Syria, but believes that war is a last resort and diplomacy should be given every chance. He has reiterated his opposition to a unilateral US no-fly zone in Syria, while at the same time supporting those in Syria seeking to unseat Bashar al-Assad.

Syrian Refugees: Sanders has opposed calls to shut borders to Syrian refugees. He has vowed that the US will not turn its back on refugees who are fleeing Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. As President, Sanders would oppose any legislation that would seek to prohibit Syrian (and Iraqi) refugees from entering the United States.

ISIS: Sanders believes that the priority in Syria should be to eliminate ISIS and remove Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power through collaboration with Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran. He supports President Obama’s effort to combat ISIS but does not want the US to take a leading role in that campaign. In 2015, he acknowledged the role of Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the fight against ISIS and warned that other countries will also have to get their hands dirty.

Iraq: Sanders voted against the 2002 resolution authoring the invasion of Iraq. While he initially supported US military intervention in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he eventually opposed the open-ended commitment of US troops there.

Iran: Sanders sees Iran as a major player in the Middle East and believes that diplomatic relations between Iran and the West are vital for regional stability and the long-term security interests of the US. Sanders supports the Iran Nuclear Agreement and has publicly praised President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry and the P5+1 for achieving the Agreement.