



Bernie Sanders Announces Run for Presidency in 2016

Independent Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont announced on April 30 that he will seek the Democratic nomination for president in 2016. A self-described “Democratic socialist,” Sanders generally caucused with Democrats during his career in Congress, but sometimes took a stance on foreign policy and personal liberty issues that put him at odds with the party establishment. In making his announcement, Sanders said he would run as an “independent Democrat,” because of the difficulties in running as a third-party candidate.



“After a year of travel, discussion and dialogue, I have decided to be a candidate for the Democratic nomination for president,” Sanders stated in his announcement to his supporters.

In his e-mail, he took a typically populist tone, stating: “The middle class in America is at a tipping point. It will not last another generation if we don’t boldly change course now.”

WMUR (the ABC-affiliated television station in Manchester, New Hampshire) and KWWL (the NBC-affiliated station in Waterloo, Iowa) posted excerpts from Sanders’ statement that read, in part:

For forty years, the middle class has been disappearing. It’s that 99% of all new income is going to the top 1%, and the grotesque level of wealth and income inequality today is worse than at any time since the late 1920s. The people at the top are grabbing all the new wealth and income for themselves, and the rest of America is being squeezed and left behind.

The disastrous decisions of the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case and in other related cases are undermining the very foundations of American democracy, as billionaires rig the system by using their Super PACS to buy politicians and elections.

Amidst Sanders’ “progressive” rhetoric there are kernels of truth. But while the rich may be getting richer, their gain is not because of lower taxes or fewer government handouts to the poor, as socialists of Sanders’ mindset usually assert. These claims are thoroughly debunked in [a recent article for *The New American*](#) by Thomas R. Eddlem, “The 99 Percent: Why Are They Barely Treading Water?”

As Eddlem notes in his article: “While there is data to back up the claim that the richest have grown richer while everyone else has stagnated since the 1970s, there’s no data to show that free enterprise or lower income tax rates are to blame.”

Eddlem goes on to explain further:

Those making claims akin to [French economist Thomas] Piketty’s suppose that top-level tax cuts have resulted in limiting government revenue from top earners — revenue that is no longer redistributed to the poor, impoverishing them. Of course, government subsidies for the poor have not been reduced in recent decades as a proportion of the economy as a whole; however, even if



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there were indeed reduced subsidies for the poor, that only could theoretically explain a small part of why some of the very poorest in America have lost ground in recent decades — if it were true. But it would reveal absolutely nothing about middle-class income stagnation, as the middle class has traditionally not qualified for government redistributive subsidies.

The article is too lengthy quote more than a brief sampling of its beneficial material here, so we recommend reading it in its entirety, as an excellent refresher essay on free-market economics.

Sanders also condemned what he termed “the disastrous decisions of the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case” and other cases that help “billionaires rig the system by using their Super PACS to buy politicians and elections.”

In *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (argued in 2009 and decided on January 21, 2010) the Supreme Court held that the First Amendment prohibited the government from restricting independent political expenditures by a nonprofit corporation. However, the principles articulated by the High Court in the case have also been extended to for-profit corporations, labor unions, and other associations.

Democrats and socialists complained that the decision would lead to corporate control of elections and, ultimately, corporate control of the government. However, Democrats in Congress had more often than Republicans been supporters of providing subsidies to corporations. House Democrats voted in favor of bailing out Wall Street banks with TARP by a margin of 172-63 back in 2008 — a full year before the *Citizens United* decision, while House Republicans opposed the bank bailout 108-91. Representative Ron Paul introduced the Federal Reserve Transparency Act of 2012, to audit the Federal Reserve, which had taken part in a secret, 16-trillion dollar bailout of Wall Street banks from 2008-10 guaranteed by the taxpayers. However, most House Democrats opposed the bill. It was passed overwhelmingly in the Republican-dominated House in 2012, but died in the Democratic-controlled Senate that same year.

Most media reports of Sanders’ announcement cast his candidacy as competition to Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination, but also as providing pressure from the political Left, either challenging or enabling Clinton to also move leftward.

A reporter from Reuters stated: “Sanders’ entry into the primaries could nudge Clinton to take more liberal positions than she might have otherwise.”

A report in *Politico* stated that Sanders “can command the liberal wing of the party and try to gain momentum to force Clinton onto his turf on three issues — income inequality, climate change and campaign finance reform.”

Another report in the *New York Times* opined: “Mr. Sanders’s bid is considered a long shot, but his unflinching commitment to stances popular with the left — such as opposing foreign military interventions and reining in big banks — could force Mrs. Clinton to address these issues more deeply.”

Such reports presume that Sanders — because of his open self-identification as a socialist — must necessarily be on the political left of Clinton. However, *The New American’s* historic “Freedom Index” scores indicate otherwise. (“The Freedom Index: A Congressional Scorecard Based on the U.S. Constitution” rates congressmen based on their adherence to constitutional principles of limited government.)

Clinton was a senator from 2001 through 2009. During her time in the Senate, she accrued a



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cumulative Freedom Index score of 19 percent. Sanders' cumulative Freedom Index score from the 106th Congress in 1999 through the 113th Congress in 2014 was 26 percent, which puts him slightly to the *right* of Clinton, not the left.

Sanders served for 16 years as Vermont's sole representative before being elected to the Senate in 2006, so his score is based on his votes in both houses.

It is not that Sanders is "conservative," by any means, but he is the type of liberal who places a premium on personal liberty and privacy, much like former Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.), who was the only Senator to vote against the USA PATRIOT Act when it was first voted on in 2001, charging that provisions in the act infringed upon citizens' civil liberties. A non-interventionist, Feingold was one of 23 U.S. senators to vote against H.J. Resolution 114, which authorized President George W. Bush to use force against Iraq in 2002. Sanders, then a representative, also voted against the resolution. He did not have an opportunity to vote on the PATRIOT Act, because it was passed by unanimous consent in the House.

When the PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011 (to extend expiring portions of the PATRIOT Act) came up for a vote on May 12, 2011, Sanders was one of 23 senators voting against the bill. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), and Mike Lee (R-Utah) were the only Republicans to vote "Nay."

Sanders appeared to be on the same page as Paul's father, Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) in 2010 when he introduced legislation in the Senate that mirrored the audit-the-Fed legislation in the House championed by Representative Paul. However, Sanders succumbed to compromise and offered an amendment that watered down the legislation considerably. Senator David Vitter (R-La.) offered an amendment to strengthen the bill, but the Senate rejected the Vitter amendment on May 11, 2010 after unanimously adopting Sanders' watered-down version.

On domestic issues, Sanders is very much the liberal/socialist/progressive. He follows the establishment global-warming line and favors the pet projects of the environmental lobby to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including tougher standards for new vehicles. A social liberal, Sanders was quoted by the *New York Times* this week as saying: "It's time for the Supreme Court to catch up to the American people and legalize gay marriage."

An economic socialist, Sanders supports a big-government approach to spending money for programs to create jobs and also favors raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour.

Sanders does have common ground with constitutionalists opposed to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an entangling arrangement falsely labeled as a "free trade" agreement that is favored by both President Obama and some Republican advocates. Sanders said of the TPP:

Are you on the side of working people who would suffer as a result of this disastrous trade agreement, and seeing their jobs go to China or Mexico? Or are you on the side of corporate America and pharmaceuticals?"

The statement may be typical of Sander's mixed-bag approach. Even when he takes the right stand, he often does so for the wrong reason, as in this case, where he blames corporations for a problem caused by government.

Therefore, while his candidacy may make the upcoming presidential race more interesting, it is questionable whether he might nudge Clinton to the left, the right, or anywhere in between.



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