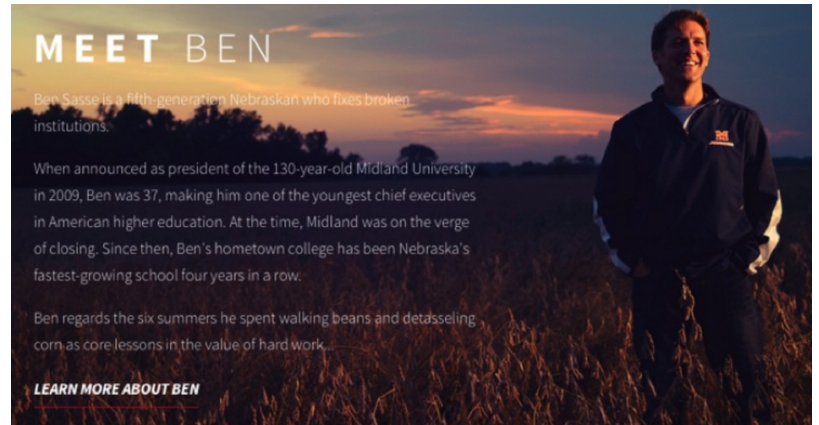




Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on May 14, 2014

Faux Conservative Sasse Wins Nebraska GOP Primary for U.S. Senate

The winner of the Nebraska Republican primary on Tuesday was [Midland University President Ben Sasse](#), and tea partiers rejoiced. Jenny Beth Martin, national coordinator of the Tea Party Patriots, was delighted to learn of Sasse's victory, exulting that he would add to the influence of other Tea Party favorites (i.e., Ted Cruz and Rand Paul) already in Washington: "They've got reinforcements coming in January. This is a win not just for Ben Sasse but for fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets."



She probably hadn't read Dean Clancy's musings on whether Sasse is the real deal or not. Early in February, Clancy, vice president for public policy at FreedomWorks, posted a blog entitled "The Trouble With Sasse," which generated a firestorm of protest from those who had bought the line that Sasse's arrival in Washington in January really would add to the legislative clout of those true lights such as Senators Rand Paul and Ted Cruz. Clancy pointed out the obvious: Sasse "supports the basic principles of ObamaCare," offered advice while in Washington as a consultant to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on "how to improve the bill while it was pending," and then personally prospered "by advising health insurance companies on how to implement it."

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Sasse built his campaign around the slogan most conservatives like to hear: repealing the healthcare law, describing himself as "the anti-ObamaCare candidate," and declaring that if the law lives, "America as we know it will die."

Clancy saw through the rhetoric:

That's all wonderful. But those things by themselves are not good enough reasons to put a man in the United States Senate. As far as I can tell, every Republican wants to repeal Obamacare. So does more than half the U.S. population. A candidate's desire to repeal Obamacare tells us approximately zero about how he will behave in office. To know that, we would also need to know his basic principles.

On that score Sasse's record reveals more than his rhetoric. A graduate of Harvard (with a concentration in government), he studied at Oxford and then got his master's in "liberal studies" at St. John's College. After a stint in Washington, D.C., as a tutor for the page program at the House of Representatives, he went on to Yale to get two more degrees, both in philosophy from the school's history department.

From there he returned to Washington to serve as chief of staff for the Justice Department. He then went on to serve as chief of staff for Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.) who has compiled a voting record over his seven-term career of just 55 as measured by The John Birch Society's Freedom Index.



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In 2007, Sasse was nominated by then-President George W. Bush to serve as the “principal advisor” to the secretary of Health and Human Services on policy development. In 2009, he became president of Midland University, a small liberal arts college located in Fremont, Nebraska, some 25 miles from Omaha.

In his primary campaign, Sasse characterized himself as a Washington “outsider,” despite his close ties to the federal government. He was called to task by John Stossel on his show on February 14 when he pointedly asked Sasse how he could, with a straight face, call himself an outsider with all these insider credentials. Sasse’s response was revealing: “I only spent four years in Washington. At heart I’m a private-sector kind of guy.”

Other observers agree with Clancy and Stossel: Sasse is a closet liberal pawing himself off as a conservative. Writing at ABC News, Charles Babington said he “is hardly the out-of-right-field firebrand that some tea partyers cherish,” noting that Sasse, while in Washington, also enjoyed “visiting scholar status” at the left-leaning Brookings Institution. Even establishment Republicans recognize who they have in the next senator from Nebraska. Ford O’Connell, a Republican Party strategist, noted happily:

On Wednesday, the tea party groups will jump up and down. They got their guy.

But the good thing for [us establishment] Republicans is that Sasse wants to be a serious conservative and a problem-solver.

Earlier in his campaign, Sasse castigated Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell for failing to lead the Senate, demanding that “every Republican in Washington, starting with Mitch McConnell, show some actual leadership.” This was just for the rubes back home. On Tuesday the real Sasse told MSNBC, “I’m for better conservative ideas and more winsome persuasion. I’m a team player and looking forward to supporting whoever our leader is.”

When asked if that included the previously excoriated McConnell, Sasse responded: “Absolutely.”

Once Sasse gets to Washington in January, Jenny Beth Martin and others celebrating Tuesday’s primary victory will learn, to their dismay, that Nebraska will have voted to replace the retiring Senator Mike Johanns (Freedom Index: 68) with another one just like him. The suit will change, but the voting record will remain the same.

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.



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