



‘This is for the future. This is for the good of the whole country. If we don’t come up with policies that encourage economic equality, we’re going to end up in a feudal society.’

— TOM BROWN, LANE COUNTY FOR BERNIE SANDERS VOLUNTEER



FREE EDUCATION AND 'SOCIALISM'

Ultimately, the most popular issue among those interviewed was the cost of higher education. Madelon DeVita, a retired medical transcriptionist, says that when she went to college things were very different.

“I went to college for free,” she says. “For free! We had a registration fee of maybe \$25 and we paid for our books, which were much cheaper. I think the most expensive book I ever bought was \$35, not \$300.”

DeVita says it’s sad to see the millennials, or those born at the turn of this century, being handcuffed and shackled with debt.

“Slowly, over 40 years, the states were given less and less money for education [and] we started putting more money into the military,” she says. “When things happen slowly, you don’t see it as much.”

DeVita says that her ex-husband completed a Ph.D. without any debt because the G.I. Bill covered the expenses.

Sanders has a six-point plan to lower the cost of higher education. He says better education is needed in a more competitive global economy, and that the current cost of going to a university is counter-productive to the nation’s best interests and future.

Some have labeled Sanders as a socialist because of the plans he hopes to implement. He doesn’t seem too bothered by this — by his own account he’s running as a democratic socialist — and his supporters in Eugene don’t seem to think it’s a bad thing either.

DeVita says she’s always been “a very left-leaning Democrat. So when Sanders came out saying he’s a democratic socialist, I was going ‘Yay, I found my man!’”

As part of his platform, Sanders wants to take on Wall Street, the economic disparity between the wealthiest 1 percent and the rest of the population and immigration reform. He wants to improve upon the Affordable Health

Act, with a program he calls Medicare for All.

While some are hypercritical of these plans, DeVita thinks it’s “fabulous” that people are referring to the candidate as a socialist.

“They don’t realize what it means. They equate socialism and fascism,” she says. “Democratic socialism gives a strong social safety net, such as free tuition, free healthcare, and we don’t know any different because that’s always been the way it is.”

THE MOVEMENT

At the grassroots level, Berners across Oregon say they are confident their candidate will win in their state.

Attendance at Lane County for Bernie Sanders meetings has grown by leaps and bounds. According to local progressive activist Ruth Duemler, the first meeting had 11 attendees, the most recent she attended had 300. That doesn’t include campus group UO for Bernie Sanders, she says.

Emma Easley Darden, a professional photographer and organizer with Portland for Bernie Sanders, says Sanders is the candidate that represents the people’s interests.

“My husband and I would have had to potentially gone through bankruptcy twice due to our child being in the ICU,” Darden says. “He really cares about all of those things, they aren’t just campaign points.”

“There was a national day of rallies, there’s going to be another one on Feb. 27. We decided to have a rally, as opposed to a march, to coalesce attention for Bernie Sanders,” Darden says.

She can probably expect good turnout. Of a Sanders rally in Portland’s Pioneer Square back on Jan. 22, she says two security guards that do regular events estimated attendance at “about 2,000.”

Portland City Commissioner and one-time Senate candidate Steve Novick was optimistic about Sanders’ chances as well.

“He will definitely win Oregon,” Novick said in an interview with *EW*. “Oregon has a history of voting for the insurgent candidate.” Novick himself has endorsed Sanders.

“New Hampshire was so validating,” Darden says, of Sanders’ recent success in the primary there “to see how many people were really excited to get out and be part of the electorate.”

Back in Lane County, Lane County for Bernie Sanders organizer Tim Morris says of New Hampshire, “This historic win has erased any doubt of his electability and changed the conversation of national politics forever.” He adds, “I think we will all be surprised with the Nevada caucus come Feb. 20.”

Keating says it’s important Oregon’s Berners help aid the movements in other states because Oregon’s primary isn’t until May. Morris says that from Feb. 17 to 21 some Oregon Berners are heading to Nevada to volunteer during that state’s Feb. 20 caucuses.

And speaking of May, Sanders’ supporters remind voters that Oregon residents can only vote in the Democratic primaries if they’re registered Democrats.

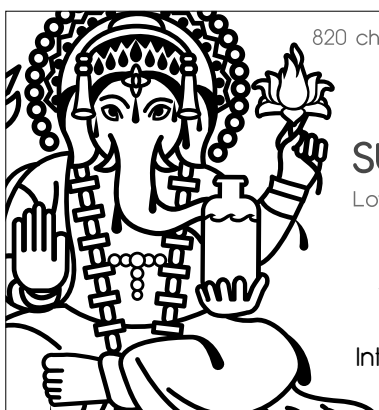
Sanders’ strong support in Oregon and his placement in the recent primaries is also one of the reasons why the campaign is pushing phone banking in other states, Howe adds.

Retired union welder and Lane County for Bernie Sanders volunteer Tom Brown says: “I’ve got Medicare. My medical is covered. I’ve got social security. I’m in relatively good shape.”

But this isn’t about him, Brown says; it’s about the nation. “No, this is for the future,” he explains. “This is for the good of the whole country. If we don’t come up with policies that encourage economic equality, we’re going to end up in a feudal society.” ■

Lane County for Bernie Sanders meets at Cozmic 12:30 pm every Saturday.

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