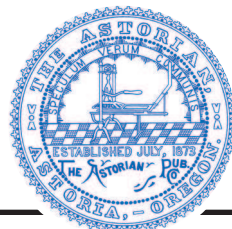


OPINION



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PRO-CON

Is Sanders the Democrats' best bet to beat President Trump?



AP Photo/Matthew Putney

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders speaks at a rally at the Iowa state fairgrounds in Des Moines.

PRO: Sanders' high energy level and loyal followers make him the Dems' front-runner

DALLAS — Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders: He was the best of Democratic presidential candidates, he was the worst of Democratic presidential candidates.

Let's start with the worst. Sanders isn't even a member of the Democratic Party. He is officially an independent.

It would be unusual if the Democratic presidential nominee weren't actually a Democrat. But these are unusual times.

Another issue is Sanders' age. He'll be 79 years old when the 2020 presidential election takes place, making him the oldest president if he wins, five years older than Donald Trump.

On the other hand, even at their age no one can accuse Sanders or Trump of being "low energy." He certainly would bring much more energy to his campaign than Hillary Clinton displayed in her sluggish race for the White House in 2016.

A third challenge for Sanders: No one knows whether the country is ready for a self-proclaimed "democratic socialist" sitting in the Oval Office.

It's clear Democrats are open to the idea — Gallup says 57 percent of Democrats view socialism favorably — but what about middle America?

Yet Sanders has several factors working in his favor that make him the Democrats' odds-on favorite, at least for now.

Anyone who can raise \$6 million from 223,000 individuals within 24 hours after announcing he's a presidential candidate is a political force to be reckoned with.

Sanders has name recognition and a large pool of potential volunteers, many of whom are energized, motivated and feel the Clinton political machine robbed Sanders of the 2016 Democratic nomination.

Finally, if you think the political pendulum will swing hard in the opposite direction of Trump — and most Democrats do — Sanders is about as far in the opposite direction as you can go.

For example, Trump has never held political office before running for president; Sanders has spent his entire adult life in public office — or trying to get there. Trump is a capitalist and successful businessman. Sanders is a socialist who has

never run a private sector business.

And Sanders is a principled politician — although many people disagree with his socialist principles. Trump's principles have shifted frequently over the years, though he seems committed to a mostly conservative agenda today.

With money pouring in, experience, widespread name recognition and a political party increasingly eager to embrace socialism, Sanders may be the Democrats' best chance to beat Trump. But that doesn't mean it's a good chance.

It's very difficult to beat an elected incumbent president. Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in 1980 and Bill Clinton defeated George H.W. Bush in 1992. Otherwise, you have to go back to 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt defeated President Herbert Hoover.

All three losing incumbents presided over weak economies. The Trump economy is very strong — for now.

Another issue: Democrats typically campaign on the left to win the nomination and then move to the middle, at least in their public speeches, to attract independent voters.

Sanders is unlikely to make that shift. Will that alienate the 63 percent of all voters who view socialism unfavorably?

It's a long time until the next presidential election and a lot can — and no doubt will — happen between now and then.

Sanders currently is polling strong among Democrats, who think the country will be ready to change directions in 2020. And that is surely what Sanders would do.

But even as Democratic presidential candidates gear up to win the nomination, many average Americans observing what's increasingly becoming a political spectacle may see some truth in the rest of Charles Dickens' opening statement in "A Tale of Two Cities":

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..."

Merrill Matthews is a resident scholar with the Institute for Policy Innovation.



Merrill Matthews

CON: Sanders would spell disaster for America — and Democrats, too

CHICAGO — Although the field of 2020 Democratic presidential candidates seems to grow daily, one name stands out at this early juncture: Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.).

Bernie's back on the campaign trail and drumming up the liberal base for a run atop the 2020 Democratic Party ticket. And who knows, with Joe Biden still undecided, Bernie sure seems like a solid front-runner.

Despite the fact that Sanders is the leading declared candidate in most polls — he also raised more than \$10 million in the first week after his announcement — Bernie would be a disastrous Democratic presidential nominee and possibly the best thing for President Donald Trump's re-election bid.

Sanders is a self-avowed "democratic socialist." He honeymooned in the Soviet Union and has a long track record of praising socialist and communist regimes — not exactly something that most American voters would agree with.

Bernie's socialist policies and ideology are well out of line with what most Americans want. Just consider some of the radical things Sanders has said about socialism:

"It's funny," Sanders once said. "Sometimes American journalists talk about how bad a country is because people are lining up for food. That's a good thing. In other countries, people don't line up for food, rich people get the food and poor people starve to death."

"In 1959 ... everybody was totally convinced that Castro was the worst guy in the world and all of the Cuban people were going to rise up in rebellion against Fidel Castro," Sanders said.

"They forgot that he educated their kids, gave their kids health care, totally transformed the society." And those are just a small sample of the "Sanders Socialism Greatest Hits Collection."

Given these statements, it is quite amazing that Sanders currently holds a seat in the U.S. Senate, let alone that he almost won the 2016 contest to become the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

Some might feel tempted to give Bernie the benefit of the doubt. After all, he made

those crazy statements many years ago.

No doubt Sanders, along with the rest of the world, witnessed the horrific collapse of communism in the late 20th century.

Moreover, some might think Sanders has learned from the chaos taking place in Venezuela and the human rights tragedies in North Korea, two modern examples of socialist and communist horrors.

However, despite the cavalcade of evidence, Sanders continues to refuse to acknowledge the absolute failure of his socialist/communist ideology.

Sanders would rather double down and inflict this horror show upon Americans, if he were to somehow get elected to the highest office in the land.

Just take a quick peek at the items on Bernie's policy platform: **Medicare for all:** "We must expand 'Medicare for All' by creating a single-payer health-care system for every American."

College tuition: "All public colleges and universities should be tuition free."

Energy efficiency: "The United States must transform its energy system away from fossil fuels such as oil and coal, and towards energy-efficient, sustainable, clean, and renewable energy solutions such as wind, solar, and geothermal."

Expanding the social safety net and increasing access to opportunity: "Use revenue from progressive taxation to expand and create programs to help alleviate poverty and help Americans move forward and contribute to a more robust, equitable economy," Sanders says.

And these socialist policy proposals are only the tip of the iceberg.

Thankfully, most American voters still don't want socialism. A recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal survey shows only 18 percent of Americans have a positive view of socialism.

In 2020, Bernie very well could be the last Democrat standing at the end of the party's presidential nomination contest. If he is, Americans will very likely reject his far-left policies, as they have for more than two centuries, spelling doom for Democrats.

Chris Talgo is an editor at The Heartland Institute, a conservative think tank.



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