

Democratic presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. interrupt each other during the NBC, YouTube Democratic presidential debate at the Gaillard Center, Sunday in Charleston, S.C. AP Photo/Mic Smith

# Gloves come off

Clinton, Sanders turn up heat at final debate before Iowa caucuses

By KEN THOMAS  
Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — In their final debate before the Iowa caucuses, the gloves came off between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders.

Shouting over each other at times, the two leading Democratic presidential candidates engaged in some of their toughest exchanges of the campaign on Sunday night, underscoring the narrowing race between them in the first-to-vote states of Iowa and New Hampshire.

Clinton sought an advantage over the Vermont senator on curbing gun violence. Sanders, meanwhile, twice assailed the former secretary of state for accepting big money in speaking fees from Wall Street, drawing some boos as he did so.

Health care emerged as a major dividing line, placing the future of President Barack Obama's health care law in the spotlight. Just two hours before the debate, Sanders released a proposal that would create a "Medicare for all" health care system funded by higher taxes on middle class families and the wealthy. Clinton warned that reopening the health care debate would put Obama's health care law at risk.

Trailing in preference polls by a wide margin, former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley tried to enter into the conversation with mixed results.

Here are some takeaways from Sunday's Democratic debate:

**Tough talk:** Sanders and Clinton came to the debate stage loaded with stinging attacks for each other — and they were ready to use them.

Questioning her commitment to policing excess on Wall Street, Sanders twice invoked Clinton's receipt of lucrative speaking fees after leaving her post as secretary of state in early 2013. "You've received \$600,000 in speaking fees from Goldman Sachs in one year," Sanders said pointedly.

Clinton tried to turn the argument back on Sanders, suggesting his criticism of financial regulations was a knock on Obama's receipt of donations from Wall Street during his two presidential campaigns.

She also pointed out that Sanders once called Obama "disappointing" during the president's first term and suggested the senator wanted someone to run against Obama as he sought re-election in the 2012 primaries.

"Your profusion of comments about your feelings towards President Obama are a little strange given what you said about him in 2011," Clinton quipped at one point.

The exchanges were a far cry from the first debate of their campaign, when Sanders famously refused to attack Clinton for her use of a private email account and

## AP FACT CHECK

### Gunslingers on Amtrak?

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hillary Clinton bungled statistics when giving President Barack Obama's health care law credit for driving down the nation's health costs and picked through her rival's gun control record for just the parts that make him look like a buddy of the gun lobby.

Sen. Bernie Sanders also was selective with his facts, playing up the gun votes he most wants Democrats to know about. And he glossed over the complexities of the brand-new health care reinvention he's proposing for a country still grappling with the last one.

A look at some of the claims and how they compare with the facts:

**CLINTON on effects of Obama's health care law:** "We now have driven costs down to the lowest they've been in 50 years."

**THE FACTS:** Not so. Health care spending is far higher than a half century ago. What she must have meant is that the rate of growth of health care spending year to year is lower than it's been in 50 years — closer to the truth, but still not right.

The government reported in December that health care spending in 2014 grew at the fastest pace since Obama took office, driven by expanded coverage under his law and rising drug prices. Not only that, but health care spending grew faster than the economy as a whole, reaching 17.5 percent of GDP. That means health care was claiming a growing share of national resources.

This was after five years of historically low growth in health spending — the decline Clinton was trying to address. But the lull in health care inflation was attributed in large measure to the recession that Obama inherited and its aftermath, not his law. And part of the reason health spending increased after that was because of the economic recovery.

**SANDERS:** "I have a D-minus voting record from the NRA." "I have supported from Day 1 an instant background check," as well as a ban on assault-type weapons.

**CLINTON:** "He voted to let guns go on to the Amtrak." "He voted against the Brady bill five times" as well as for allowing guns in national parks and for shielding the gun industry from most lawsuits.

**THE FACTS:** Both are singling out aspects of Sanders' record that suit them, but that record is nuanced. Sanders indeed supported an instant background check, and at certain points a three-day waiting period. But he opposed longer waiting periods — of five to 10 days — which gun control advocates see as a more effective way to flag people who should not be getting a gun.

Clinton is right that he opposed various versions of the Brady bill with longer waiting periods. But his poor marks from the National Rifle Association reflect record that does lean toward stronger gun controls. Sanders now says he would support exposing gun makers to lawsuits. Since 2010, people who are entitled to carry guns by state and federal law have been allowed to carry those weapons in national parks, except for certain buildings, under a law Sanders supported.

**CLINTON:** "One out of three African-American men may well end up going to prison. That's the statistic."

**THE FACTS:** That's a stale statistic, and Clinton isn't the only person to use it. Sanders has said nearly the same thing. Both drew on 13-year-old data that stated this as a projection, not a fact.

A 2003 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics said, "About 1 in 3 black males, 1 in 6 Hispanic males, and 1 in 17 white males are expected to go to prison during their lifetime, if current incarceration rates remain unchanged." But it went on to say that at the time, 16.6 percent of adult black males had actually ever gone to prison, or 1 in 6. The incarceration rate for black men has gone down since then, according to the Sentencing Project.

server during her time as secretary of state.

**Practicality vs. passion:** In some respects, the debate crystallized one of the main differences between Sanders and Clinton: passion versus practicality.

His voice rising at time, Sanders offered a rousing case for a massive expansion of government: a universal health care system paid for with higher taxes, free college tuition and a generous system of paid family leave for workers. But he faced questions over how he would pay for it all.

"A little bit more in taxes, do away with private health insurance premiums," Sanders explained. "It's a pretty good deal."

Clinton said her policies were superior and the American people would know how her plan would be implemented and paid for.

"I'm the only candidate standing here tonight who has said I will not raise taxes on the middle class," she said. "I want to raise incomes, not taxes, and I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that the wealthy pay for debt free

tuition, for child care, for paid family leave."

And Clinton made an all-purpose case for her leadership and her ability win the White House, saying, "We need a president who can do all aspects of the job."

**Health care and guns:** The fighting wasn't just over politics, but over policy, too, as Clinton and Sanders exchanged barbs over gun control and their competing health care plans — two issues that have emerged as central to the race in recent days.

Clinton charged Sanders with reversing his position on a 2005 bill that granted gun manufacturers immunity from lawsuits. She listed a series of provisions that she said the senator, who represents rural communities in Vermont, had supported in line with the NRA.

Sanders swiftly responded, saying that Clinton was being "very disingenuous" and pointed to his lifetime rating of "D-minus" from the National Rifle Association.

O'Malley chimed in and said he had actually pushed through gun control measures in Maryland. "I've never met a self-respecting hunter that needed an AR-15 to down a deer," he said.

On health care, Clinton criticized Sanders' single-payer plan — released just hours before the debate — as a risk to Obama's signature health care law. She suggested that Sanders was winging it, too: "When we're talking about health care, the details really matter."

Sanders said his universal health care had been the cause of two Democratic Party forefathers: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. He implied that Clinton wouldn't go far enough to ensure that everyone had access to health care, saying the debate was about "whether we have the guts to stand up to the private insurance companies and all of their money."

**Getting close to Obama:** Throughout the debate, Clinton embraced Obama's legacy, making the calculation that the president's popularity could help her with primary voters. For Clinton, embracing Obama is one way for her to try and drive a wedge between Sanders and Democratic voters.

She repeatedly defended the Affordable Care Act and said Sanders' approach would reopen a debate that might come back to haunt Democrats. "I do not to want see the Republicans repeat it, and I don't to want see us start over again with a contentious debate," she said.

Clinton's case for tougher gun control also aimed to put her on the same side as Obama, who recently signed executive orders aimed at addressing a spate of shootings, including a deadly rampage last summer at a Charleston church, a few blocks from the debate hall.

## BRIEFLY

### Abduction of Americans in Iraq raises fears about security

BAGHDAD (AP) — The abduction of three Americans from a Baghdad apartment over the weekend is the latest in a series of brazen high-profile kidnappings undermining confidence in the Iraqi government's ability to control state-sanctioned Shiite militias that have grown in strength as Iraqi security forces battle the Islamic State group.

Witnesses said men in uniform carried out the kidnapping in broad daylight Saturday, 100 yards (meters) from a police station.

"Gunmen in military uniforms came in five or six SUVs, they entered the building and then left almost immediately," said Mohammad Jabar, 35, who runs a shop down the street from the three-story apartment building where the Americans had been invited by their Iraqi interpreter.

"A few hours later we heard that three foreigners had been kidnapped by these gunmen," Jaber said.

The three were abducted in Dora, a mixed neighborhood that is home to both Shiites and Sunnis. However, they were then taken to Sadr City, a vast and densely populated Shiite district to the east, and there "all communication ceased," an Iraqi intelligence official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters.

### U.S. Congressmen in Germany to meet Americans released by Iran

LANDSTUHL, Germany (AP) — Three U.S. Congressmen traveled Monday to the medical center in Germany where three Americans, released by Iran as part of a prisoner swap, are being treated.

Former U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati, Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian and pastor Saeed Abedini arrived late Sunday at the U.S. military's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

Rezaian, who was freed Saturday after almost 18 months of incarceration in an Iranian prison, met with Washington Post editors on Monday for the first time since his release, the Post reported.

"I want people to know that physically I'm feeling good," said Rezaian, wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt and blue jeans provided to him on board the plane that flew the released prisoners to freedom. "I know people are eager to hear from me, but I want to process this for some time."

### Islamic State's double standards sow growing disillusion

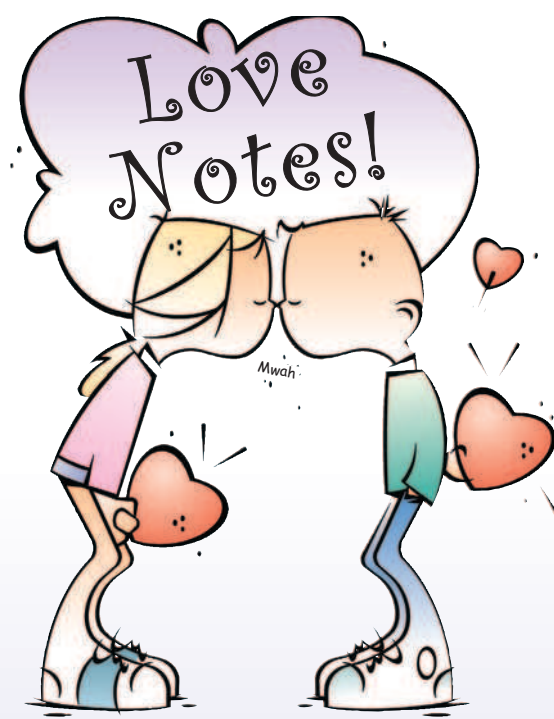
GAZIANTEP, Turkey (AP) — Mohammed Saad, a Syrian activist, was imprisoned by the Islamic State group, hung by his arms and beaten regularly. Then one day, his jailers quickly pulled him and other prisoners down and hid them in a bathroom.

The reason? A senior Muslim cleric was visiting to inspect the facility. The cleric had told the fighters running the prison that they shouldn't torture prisoners and that anyone held without charge must be released within 30 days, Saad told The Associated Press. Once the coast was clear, the prisoners were returned to their torment.

"It's a criminal gang pretending to be a state," Saad said, speaking in Turkey, where he fled in October. "All this talk about applying Shariah and Islamic values is just propaganda, Daesh is about torture and killing," he said, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

Syrians who have recently escaped the Islamic State group's rule say public disillusionment is growing as IS has failed to live up to its promises to install a utopian "Islamic" rule of justice, equality and good governance.

Instead, the group has come to resemble the dictatorial rule of Syrian President Bashar Assad that many Syrians had sought to shed, with a reliance on informers who have silenced a fearful populace. Rather than equality, society has seen the rise of a new elite class — the jihadi fighters — who enjoy special perks and favor in the courts, looking down on "the commoners" and even ignoring the rulings of their own clerics.



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