

Sanders energizes Springfield crowd

BY JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

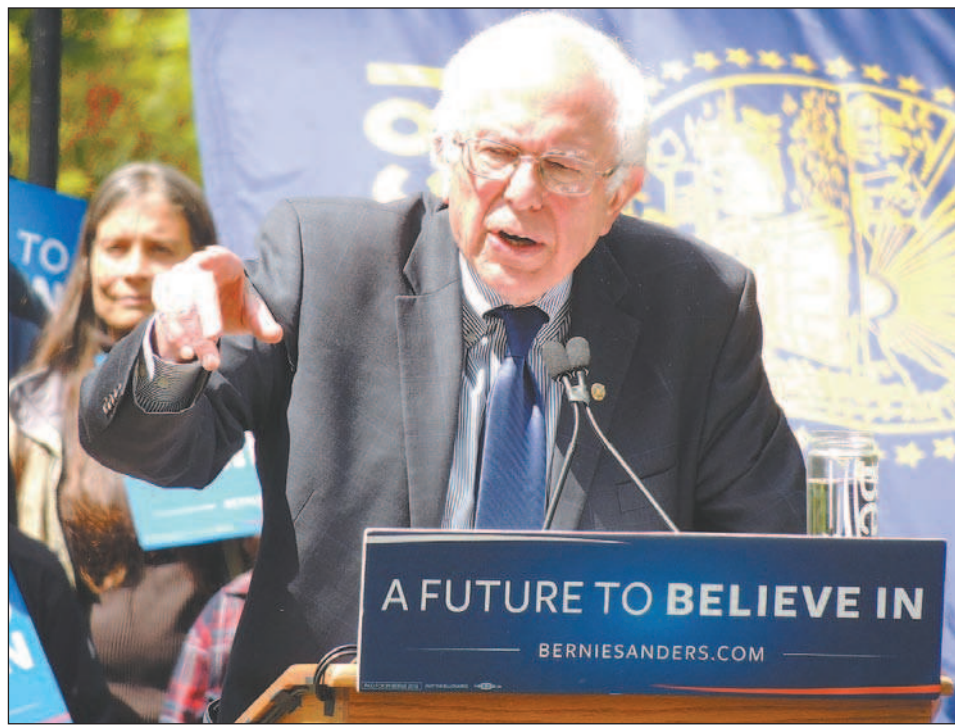


photo by Jon Stinnett

Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders addresses a large group of supporters at Springfield's Island Park.

"You can't be for Wall Street and working people," he said, later adding that it's "our job not just to revitalize the Democratic party, but to revitalize democracy."

To do just that, Sanders advocated for automatic voter registration for all who reach the age of 18. He said his campaign is doing something unusual in that it is telling the truth, advocating the overthrow of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision that opened the door for less stringent campaign finance options.

"We should not have to beg millionaires for money," he said.

Sanders called out the Walton family, owners of Walmart, urging them to "get off welfare and pay their workers a living wage." He advocated investment "in young people in jobs and education, not incarceration."

"Young people understand that they're our future, and they want to be a part in helping to shape it," he said, calling for tuition-free public universities.

"This is not a radical idea, and it could be accomplished with one simple tax on Wall Street speculation," he said.

Among the crowd in Springfield were many Cottage Grove residents, especially young ones. Sixteen-year old Auna Ochoa later explained why Sanders holds such a powerful appeal among young people.

"Because he's our future," Ochoa said. "He cares about what we think, and none of the other candidates seem to really care what everybody thinks."

Sanders will hope for the support of voters young and old as he takes on Clinton in Oregon's Democratic primary on May 17.

Democratic presidential candidate and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders spoke to a crowd of thousands at Springfield's Island Park on Thursday, a speech heard by many who made the trip up from Cottage Grove.

Crowds began to gather early, some waiting hours before being admitted that morning in a line outside the park that stretched for several blocks. Once inside, the crowd — a youngish group generally but not entirely — found a stage setup inside a grove of trees next to the Willamette River and cottonwood fluff floating on a gentle breeze.

Local political organizer Matt Keating got the event started with a rousing Shakespearean adaptation, "To Bern or not to Bern," and Sanders himself showed up just after a phalanx of national news reporters at about 12:10 p.m. He pointed out that national polls show him faring better against Republican frontrunner Donald Trump than Sanders' Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton. While Sanders acknowledged that, "we must not have a Republican in the White House," he made his own case as the "strongest Democratic candidate" who "has the support of millions of independents."

Sanders said that it's "hard to imagine anyone voting for the Republican agenda," calling it a "fringe agenda" while adding that the Democratic party has "not been clear about which side it is on."

COUNTY

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"I was initially very skeptical as well," said Councilor Mike Fleck. "But how many times has the County come here and talked to us about economic development? I'm cautiously optimistic. I'd like us to look at the collaborative aspect, because that's what it's going to really take."

County Economic Development Manager Sarah Means,

known to many locals as Sarah Misejewski during her time as head of Cottage Grove's Community Development Corporation, pointed out that lottery funds had been budgeted for the liaison position, described as a "bridge with the County's rural partners" that would help those communities navigate county policies and processes. Newsletters for rural communities and help with business recruitment were also mentioned.

"Please be patient with us as we define this new position," Means said. "What we're looking for from you is a list of priorities from communities that need help."

Mohrisky stepped back up to the podium to tell the Council that the position Means recently left has not been filled, leaving budget space for the liaison position.

"What we're proposing is not an increase, as we've already

funded a position focused on the metro area," he said. "That position will now be dedicated almost exclusively to partnering with rural communities, and over time, we hope we're going to see a tangible difference in these partnerships."

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