

Ultra-right Texas senator is first official US presidential candidate

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The 2016 US presidential campaign began Monday with the first official announcement by a candidate seeking the nomination of one of the two corporate-controlled parties. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas declared his candidacy for the Republican nomination in a speech at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

The 44-year-old Texas senator, who bears an unpleasant resemblance, in his bullying style and perpetual sneer, to the late Senator Joe McCarthy, is almost unknown to the public. He has little support even among likely Republican primary voters, where he polls in the low single digits.

Nonetheless, his campaign launch was given massive and respectful media publicity and presented as the beginning of the official presidential campaign. Several other Republican hopefuls are expected to announce their candidates in the next month, including Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

These announcements are part of the process in which an array of reactionaries, self-promoters and semi-fascists are put through their paces by the American financial elite in order to select the Republican nominee for president, one of two tested defenders of big business who will represent the “choice” given to the American people in the 2016 elections.

For the Democrats, the presumptive front-runner, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, is also reported to be planning an April campaign launch.

The spring timetable for the formal announcements is driven by the requirements of fundraising, since any viable candidate--from the standpoint of the two-party system--must accumulate a war chest of at least \$25 million in the year before the election. For Clinton, Bush and Walker, the presumptive candidates most

favorable by the multi-millionaires, that sum will be raised quickly. For long shots like Cruz, fundraising is the first “primary”--the first and most important test of their ability to sustain a campaign past the first contests in Iowa and New Hampshire next March.

Cruz is a first-term senator, elected in 2012 as a Tea Party candidate, having defeated an establishment Republican for the party’s nomination in Texas. His embrace of right-wing populism is an awkward fit for his biography as a graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School who has worked as a government lawyer his entire life. Similarly, his denunciations of the Wall Street bailouts sound hollow given his marriage to a managing director at Goldman Sachs, one of the principal recipients of Treasury cash.

Once in the US Senate, Cruz gained national notoriety for precipitating the 2013 partial shutdown of the federal government in a quixotic effort to force the Obama administration to abandon its health care overhaul.

Mainly identified with opposition to Obamacare, the Texas senator chose the Virginia location to announce his candidacy, instead of the traditional home state location, in an effort to broaden his appeal to the Christian fundamentalist wing of the Republicans. Liberty University was established by the late Rev. Jerry Falwell, founder of the defunct Moral Majority, and it remains a hotbed of Christian right politics.

Cruz addressed a compulsory assembly of 10,000 students and was repeatedly interrupted with applause as he ticked off a laundry list of positions favored by the ultra-right, including rejection of gay marriage and abortion, stricter border enforcement, ending all restrictions on gun ownership, denunciation of what he called “Islamic terrorism,” and unconditional support for the state of Israel and its right-wing prime minister,

Benjamin Netanyahu.

As the son of a Cuban exile turned evangelical minister, Cruz combines bellicose defense of American imperialism with appeals to fundamentalist religious sentiments. His main function in the race is to act as a right-wing anchor for the entire field, staking out positions that will drag both the Republican candidates and their Democratic counterparts further to the right.

Among his more bizarre stances is an insistence, as chairman of the Senate committee controlling the budget of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, that NASA focus its resources on non-Earth projects, abandoning programs that study the Earth from space. Such studies have tended to reinforce the warnings of climate scientists about the dangers of global warming. Like many right-wing Republicans, Cruz denies global warming, and portrays the scientific evidence as the product of a conspiracy to increase government regulation of industries such as oil, coal and electricity generation.



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