Bernie Sanders to seek Democratic presidential nomination

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US Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont confirmed Thursday that he was seeking the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party. The announcement, made in an email statement sent out to supporters, followed by a brief press conference on the lawn of the US Capitol, marks a new stage in one of the longest-running political frauds in American history.

Since 1990, when he won the first of eight terms as Vermont's sole member of the House of Representatives, and continuing with his election in 2006 to the US Senate, and reelection in 2012, Sanders has formally declared himself to be an independent. On occasion he goes further, calling himself a democratic socialist, suggesting that he represents some sort of opposition to Wall Street's domination of American political and economic life.

Throughout this period, Sanders has caucused with the Democrats in the House and then the Senate, receiving the same treatment as any other Democrat in terms of committee assignments and promotions. This year his seniority allowed him to achieve the position of ranking minority member on the Budget Committee, making him responsible for preparing the budget offered by the Senate Democrats as an alternative to that drafted by the Republican majority.

Although he first won his House seat over Democratic opposition, Sanders has long since buried the hatchet. Leading Democratic senators like Wall Street favorite Charles Schumer of New York backed his election to the Senate in 2006, and President Obama traveled to Vermont in 2012 to campaign for his reelection.

In formally seeking the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, Sanders is only admitting publicly what has always been a reality. His "independence" is as much of a sham as his "socialism."

According to the rules set down by the Democratic National Committee, any candidate for the presidential nomination must be a "member in good standing." The DNC issued a statement welcoming the Vermont senator into the race, indicating that the Obama White House, the Clinton campaign organization and the Democratic Party establishment as a whole will make no obstacles to his candidacy. Sanders will be included in the Democratic candidate debates and no special effort will be made to keep him off the ballot.

Press reports described Sanders as the standard-bearer for the liberal wing of the Democrats against the overwhelming favorite for the nomination, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton. There was discussion of a "Warren-Sanders" wing of the Democratic Party, a reference to Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, who has denied interest in a presidential race at this point, but could easily change course in the event Clinton proves vulnerable.

The Sanders candidacy follows in the footsteps of similar efforts to give a left cover to the increasingly right-wing policies of the Democratic Party. Al Sharpton and Congressman Dennis Kucinich played that role in the 2004 campaign, with Kucinich coming back for a re-run in 2008.

In media interviews Wednesday and Thursday and at his press conference, Sanders struck a pose as a critic of Wall Street and the domination of American politics by multi-millionaires and billionaires. He identified as his three main issues the growth of economic inequality, the political influence of big money, and the increasing danger from climate change.

Significantly, his only reference to foreign policy was a chauvinist denunciation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement with a dozen countries, including Japan, directed against China. Sanders said nothing about the growing danger of war, whether in the Middle East, Asia or Eastern Europe, and he never mentioned the Obama administration—a remarkable feat, since he was announcing his candidacy to succeed Obama in the White House.

Sanders declared that the American people faced "a more serious crisis than at any time since the Great Depression," and referred to the fact that the 99 percent of all new income growth goes to the top 1 percent, and that the top 1 percent own as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. He called this staggering inequality "not just immoral but unsustainable."

But he said nothing about what policies could reverse the

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growth of inequality and create “an economy that works for working people,” or how such policies could be enacted, given the intransigent defense of the financial elite by both Republican and Democratic politicians.

Perhaps unintentionally revealing was his explanation of why he chose to run in the Democratic presidential primaries. He could not run as a third-party candidate because he was not independently wealthy. “I am not a billionaire,” he told MSNBC. “To run outside of the two-party system would require enormous sums of money.” In other words, not being an independent billionaire, he had to join one of the two parties controlled by the billionaires.

Sanders has engaged longtime Democratic Party strategist Tad Devine, a veteran of presidential campaigns by Democrats Michael Dukakis, Al Gore and John Kerry, as his principal campaign operative. Devine told Politico.com, “The one thing he’s determined not to do is to be another Ralph Nader. And the only way to avoid doing that is to avoid being a third-party candidate from the left in the general election.” This was to reassure the Democratic establishment, which vilified Nader for “stealing votes” from Gore in 2000, when the Democrats refused to fight the theft of the presidential election.

Even if Sanders does eventually choose to make a third-party run, as his supporters in groups like the Green Party and the International Socialist Organization are urging, he would still be a capitalist politician offering a capitalist program. This is demonstrated by his political record since entering Congress in 1990.

In 16 years in the House of Representatives, he voted with the Democrats 98 percent of the time, including support for President Bill Clinton’s war against Serbia in 1999. He voted for the Authorization for the Use of Military Force after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the legal basis for both the US invasion of Afghanistan and all subsequent actions in the so-called “war on terror,” including the campaign of drone missile assassination mounted by the Obama administration.

Sanders regularly votes for military appropriations for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he is a fervent supporter of the state of Israel. More recently, he backed Obama’s use of sanctions against Russia in the crisis provoked by the US-backed fascist-led coup in Ukraine.

While conventionally liberal on domestic social policies and the environment, Sanders has embraced a strident chauvinism on trade and immigration, taking his cue from the AFL-CIO unions. In 2009, Sanders sponsored an anti-immigrant amendment to Obama’s economic stimulus bill, which the American Immigration Lawyers Association denounced as a “disturbing step backwards,” which “creates a climate of jingoistic divisiveness.”

In his most important policy role, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs during last year’s scandal over conditions at VA hospitals, Sanders worked with Republican John McCain to craft bipartisan legislation that opened the door for greatly increased privatization of VA care.

The press response to Sanders’ entry into the presidential race, while dismissing his chances of winning the nomination or the presidency, was largely respectful, even positive. Bloomberg View—the editorial arm of Bloomberg News, owned by the billionaire former mayor of New York—headlined its commentary, “Bernie Sanders’ 2016 campaign may be useful for Democrats.”

“Sanders can force Clinton to make and articulate choices on precisely the type of issues that she will be most eager to evade, including a host of knotty questions related to inequality,” Bloomberg argued. In other words, Clinton can better define herself by having a “left” straw man in the race.

Other press commentaries noted that Sanders has been reluctant to criticize either Clinton or Obama, a sign that he is himself conscious of the task he has been assigned, to give the Democrats a “left” face without challenging the Wall Street consensus or damaging the presumptive nominee. Even when directly questioned about the tens of millions of dollars in donations to the Clinton Foundation from companies with issues before the Clinton State Department, Sanders declined to engage.

The author also recommends:

US presidential election season begins
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The reactionary politics of independent “socialist” Bernie Sanders
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