

Surge of small donations helps Sanders match Clinton fund-raising

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In another demonstration of the growing political discontent among working people and sections of the middle class, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders raised \$26 million for his presidential campaign in the third quarter of 2015, nearly equaling the \$28 million raised by Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton.

The bulk of the money flowing into the Sanders campaign was in the form of small donations, average barely \$30 per contribution. By contrast, the bulk of Clinton's fundraising came from wealthy contributors who gave the \$2,700 maximum permitted by federal law for direct donations to a campaign.

From July through September, the Clinton campaign held 110 fundraising events where the admission charge was the \$2,700 maximum, while the Sanders campaign held seven such events during the same period.

Well-heeled donors can give unlimited amounts of money to so-called super PACs associated with the campaigns. Sanders has declined super PAC money, while Clinton's super PACs have not yet reported their third-quarter contributions.

In one particularly revealing moment, Clinton attended a fundraising party on the evening of Friday, September 25, at the home of hedge fund multi-millionaire Cliff Robbins, who made a fortune from hostile takeovers using junk bonds, and was one of the key figures in the leveraged buyout of RJR Nabisco in 1988, the basis for the book and movie, *Barbarians at the Gate*.

The "barbarian," who now runs the Blue Harbor Group hedge fund, and 80 invited guests, each kicked in \$2,700 to the Clinton campaign. Some of these are likely to give much larger sums to the Priorities USA super PAC backing her campaign.

The Sanders campaign claimed it has received 1.3

million donations from 650,000 individual donors since the Vermont independent declared his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. The Clinton campaign reported 250,000 individual donors June 30, but declined to release a figure for donations through September 30.

Although Clinton has raised \$75 million total compared to \$40 million for Sanders, Clinton may actually have less cash on hand, according to press reports analyzing campaign spending. Her campaign has spent heavily on staff and for fundraising events for the wealthy, as well as television advertisements. Sanders has yet to run TV ads, and his campaign reported \$25 million on hand, while the Clinton campaign would not disclose its cash balance.

Only one Republican presidential candidate has reported his third-quarter fundraising: Dr. Ben Carson, the retired neurosurgeon who is running second in most polls to billionaire Donald Trump, raised \$20 million in the last three months, his campaign said.

In the second quarter of this year, Clinton raised \$47.5 million in direct donations and another \$16 million for her super PACs, while Sanders raised \$15.2 million in direct donations and nothing for super PACs.

Comparing quarter to quarter, Clinton's direct donations dropped by 42 percent while donations to the Sanders campaign rose by 68 percent.

During this same period, Sanders cut Clinton's margin in national opinion polls from 60 percent to 7 percent, and he took the lead in polls of likely caucus-goers in Iowa and likely primary voters in New Hampshire, the first two contests in the campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Sanders has continued to attract large crowds for rallies in both large cities and college towns, as well as nearly constant attention from the national news media,

including the television networks.

On Thursday the *Washington Post* carried a lengthy profile of the Sanders campaign in its online edition. The tone was negative, with the article suggesting Sanders sought federal control of health care, child care and education, complete with hostile quotes from the right-wing Cato Institute. However, the depiction of Sanders as favoring spending trillions more on public services and jobs, and taxing the rich and Wall Street to pay for it, seems more likely to boost support for his campaign than to undermine it.

Clinton still remains the favorite for the Democratic nomination, leading the polls in most states after the first two contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, and with by far the most support from Democratic Party office-holders, unelected “superdelegates” to the nominating convention, and the AFL-CIO unions.

The past month has seen a convergence of the Clinton and Sanders campaigns in terms of policy. Clinton has proposed a plan to cap the cost of prescriptions at a maximum of \$250 a month for any drug, and a plan to cut the cost of college tuition. She issued statements September 28 opposing the Keystone XL pipeline and calling for repeal of the Cadillac tax, a reactionary feature of the Obamacare program. In each case she was responding to earlier declarations by Sanders and moving closer to his positions.

Sanders has responded by shifting to the right, particularly on foreign policy, where he has repeatedly declared his willingness to use force to defend the overseas interests of American imperialism. He made a first-time appearance before the Democratic National Committee, pledging his loyalty to the Democratic Party (including its eventual presidential nominee) and offering his campaign as a lifeline, to boost the populist credentials of Democratic candidates in other state and federal contests.

On September 20, appearing on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Sanders declared his preference for the term “progressive” to describe his politics, rather than “liberal” or “socialist.” In reversing the position he took in interviews as late as June, Sanders is adopting the same watered-down terminology used by liberal Democrats to distance themselves from the “l-word” in response to smear campaigns by Republicans.

Democratic Party insiders have long since taken the measure of the Sanders campaign, recognizing it for

what it is: an effort to preempt any genuine challenge to the Democrats by corralling opposition among working people and youth, and channeling it back inside the corporate-controlled political system.

In a comment to the *Washington Post*, Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse observed, “Bernie has kind of gone off like a flare. How long that lasts remains to be seen. I don’t think he’s doing the party any damage, so I don’t mind it.”

Longtime Clinton adviser Paul Begala was even more emphatic. Asked by the *Post* whether it was time for Clinton to begin attacking Sanders directly, he replied, “I have five words of advice for the campaign. No, no, no, no and no.” Begala added cynically, “He’s raising issues we can sell in 2016.”



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