

Bowing to Democratic Party pressure, Sanders pledges to back Clinton

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After a two-day battering by Democratic Party leaders and media interrogators, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders dropped his claim that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was “not qualified” to be president because of her corrupt relationship with Wall Street and her past support for the Iraq war.

In a series of media interviews, Sanders reiterated his longstanding position that he would support Clinton if she won the Democratic presidential nomination.

Sanders began the retreat Thursday evening in an interview with Charlie Rose of CBS News. He defended his comments about Clinton as a necessary response to Clinton’s earlier attack on him, summed up in a *Washington Post* headline that read, “Clinton questions whether Sanders is qualified to be president.”

Rose pressed him on the subject, clearly seeking to extract from Sanders a direct statement that Clinton was qualified to be president. The transcript of the exchange goes as follows:

Rose: “Do you believe Secretary Clinton is unqualified to be president?”

Sanders: “Well, does Secretary Clinton believe that I am unqualified to be president?”

Rose: “But why can't you simply say yes? She has a first-rate resume in terms of a life in public service. She’s one of the most qualified people to run.”

Sanders: “She has years of experience. She is extremely intelligent. You know, I have some experience too. I have a pretty good record in Congress, as a senator, as a mayor. I think I am qualified to be president. And so to answer your question, you’re right. We should not get into this tit for tat.”

Rose then pointed to Sanders’ criticism of Clinton for her 2002 vote to authorize the war in Iraq and asked, “is that going too far to say she bears responsibility for Iraqi war deaths?”

Sanders replied, “Of course she doesn’t bear responsibility. She voted for the war in Iraq. That was a very bad vote, in my view. Do I hold her accountable? No.”

Rose prodded him again, saying, “I just want to come back to the Iraqi thing one second, and one more question. You have said that she voted for the Iraqi war. Other people did as well. Many other people. Do you hold all of them responsible for the deaths of Americans?” Sanders replied, “No.”

Then came the following exchange:

Rose: “Come November 2016, if Hillary Clinton is the nominee, you will be supporting her?”

Sanders: “Sure, I will. Look, as I said a million times, I think the idea of a Donald Trump or a Ted Cruz presidency would be an unmitigated disaster for this country. I will do everything in my power and work as hard as I can to make sure that that does not happen. And if Secretary Clinton is the nominee, I will certainly support her.”

Sanders repeated these assurances in an appearance Friday morning at a Manhattan town hall broadcast on the “Today Show” on NBC. He downplayed the mutual accusations of being “unqualified” and said he preferred to discuss what he called “real issues.”

When “Today Show” host Savannah Guthrie asked if he had “overreacted” to reports that Clinton had called him unqualified, and responded in kind, Sanders replied with praise for the Democratic frontrunner.

“Here’s the truth,” he said. “I’ve known Hillary Clinton for 25 years. I respect Hillary Clinton. We were colleagues in the Senate, and on her worst day, she would be an infinitely better president than either of the Republican candidates.”

“She’s qualified?” Guthrie asked. “Of course,” Sanders replied, and dismissed the three-day

controversy as “media stuff.”

The entire episode began with a deliberately prepared trap, when Sanders gave a lengthy interview to the editorial board of the *New York Daily News*. The tabloid ripped a single sentence from the hour-long discussion as the basis for a screaming headline accusing Sanders of insensitivity toward the families of the children killed by a deranged gunman in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012.

This was followed by further claims, by the media and the Clinton campaign, that Sanders had botched his answers to questions about breaking up the major banks and about US policy towards Israel. Then came Clinton’s declaration that Sanders “hadn’t done his homework,” transmuted by the *Washington Post* into a headline claiming Clinton had said Sanders was not qualified to be president, and Sanders’ response along similar lines.

The sequence of events demonstrates the orchestrated and manipulated character of the 2016 election campaign. Once Sanders had made his statement that Clinton was “not qualified,” the entire Democratic Party establishment came down on him. This was particularly noticeable among Sanders’ own colleagues in the Senate, where 40 of 46 Democrats have endorsed Clinton and none have endorsed Sanders.

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid denounced Sanders’ comments about Clinton, but not Clinton’s about Sanders, saying, “Everybody knows she’s qualified. So he shouldn’t be doing that.”

Senator Dianne Feinstein of California said, “I’m very concerned about the tone. I think it’s inordinately destructive, and I think it shouldn’t happen. I think this kind of disparagement doesn’t do Senator Sanders any good and doesn’t do Senator Clinton any good and doesn’t do the Democratic Party any good.”

Senator Claire McCaskill tweeted: “C’mon Bernie. Not qualified? Remember what we all have to do together in November.” McCaskill, Feinstein and Reid have all endorsed Clinton.

The exchanges between Sanders and Clinton came with a pivotal New York primary only ten days away. While Clinton holds a lead of about 250 elected delegates, Sanders has won seven out of eight contests over the last two weeks.

Sanders has not deviated from his pledge, made when he entered the race for the Democratic nomination a

year ago, that he would support the nominee of the party convention, whoever it was.

Asked on the “Today Show” Friday about his plans if he lost the nomination, Sanders called it a “fair question,” then declared, “We have brought out and seen so much excitement on the part of young people, who have so much hope for this country, who want to make this country a better place. We will continue that revolution.”

Given that Sanders has defined his “political revolution” as motivating his supporters to work for Democratic Party candidates for Congress and state office as well as the White House, this amounts to a pledge by the former “independent” senator that he is unalterably committed to the Democratic Party. The so-called “democratic socialist” is seeking to reinforce the political monopoly that big business exercises through the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans.



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