

Sanders' strong showing in Oregon, Kentucky extends Democratic presidential contest

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders won the Oregon Democratic primary by a wide margin and came within 2,000 votes of winning the Kentucky primary, dealing a blow to Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton. The victory in Oregon, by 53-47 percent, was the first for Sanders in a closed primary, where only registered Democrats are allowed to cast ballots. Clinton had won the previous 11 closed primaries, including Kentucky.

Sanders' victories had come either in caucuses or in open primaries, where he won large majorities among registered independents, swamping Clinton's edge among registered Democrats. In West Virginia a week ago, for example, Clinton led Sanders by 49-45 percent among Democrats who cast ballots, but independents voted for Sanders by 60-40 percent, giving him an easy victory.

Sanders rolled up large majorities in Portland, Oregon, the state's largest city, in college towns like Eugene and Corvallis, and in the state capital, Salem. Because Oregon conducts elections entirely by mail, voter participation was larger than in any other state so far in the 2016 campaign, with a turnout of 58 percent. That made Sanders' victory all the more significant.

The contest in Kentucky was declared "too close to call" by the Associated Press, but the television networks declared Clinton a narrow victor. Kentucky Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes, a Democrat and supporter of Clinton, said Clinton had a slim but insurmountable lead of 1,811 votes, with 99 percent of the ballots counted.

The neck-and-neck race was in stark contrast to the outcome in 2008, when Clinton defeated Barack Obama by a whopping margin, 459,511 to 209,954. Clinton's vote this year was less than half her total

eight years ago as she edged Sanders 212,549 to 210,626.

Clinton had the all-out support of Kentucky Democratic Party officials and officeholders. Last week, after publicly announcing a halt in television advertising in primary contests to conserve cash for the general election, the Clinton campaign abruptly reversed itself and poured money into Kentucky in an effort to forestall an embarrassing loss.

Sanders won all of eastern Kentucky, where the collapse of the coal industry is the dominant economic and social reality, winning by margins as high as 63 percent in Harlan County, site of some of the most bitter union battles, and 54 percent to 27 percent, with 16 percent uncommitted, in Pike County, the largest in that region. He also won the western Kentucky coalfield area and auto-manufacturing town of Bowling Green, site of a GM assembly plant.

Clinton rolled up a sizeable margin in Jefferson County, which includes the state's largest city and industrial center, Louisville, and the bulk of its African-American population. She also won Lexington, which is the second largest city in the state and site of the University of Kentucky, and the affluent Kentucky suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio.

The two results, in heavily Democratic Oregon and in Kentucky, where Republican presidential candidates have won the last four times, showed the deep unpopularity of the Democratic frontrunner, even in an electorate tailored for her, since both primaries were limited to registered Democrats and virtually all party leaders backed her campaign.

Press reports noted that as the two candidates crisscrossed Kentucky, Sanders regularly drew

thousands to his rallies while Clinton drew only hundreds.

Anticipating the dismal outcome, Clinton made no public appearance on primary night, watching the returns from her home in Chappaqua, New York and issuing no statement.

Sanders, by contrast, spoke before a packed arena in Carson, California, near Los Angeles. He told a crowd of some 10,000 people Tuesday night that he would continue his campaign through the June 7 contests in California, New Jersey, New Mexico, Montana and North and South Dakota, and the final primary on June 14 in the District of Columbia.

Appealing for support from voters in California, the most populous US state, Sanders made one of the most left-sounding speeches of the campaign, declaring that he had been born into a working-class family in Brooklyn, New York, and claiming that the Democratic Party had to represent the working class in American politics.

The leadership of the Democratic Party “has to make a fundamental choice,” he said, about “whether to bring into the party people who are willing to take on Wall Street, corporate greed and the fossil fuel industry.” If the Democratic Party would not open its doors, he warned, it would remain a party “which is, incredibly, allowing the Republican Party to win the votes of a majority of working-class Americans. I’ll be damned if I’m going to let that happen.”

The continual use of the term “working class” is a distinct shift in rhetoric on the part of Sanders, who is a self-described “democratic socialist” but has shied away from any overt class appeal in favor of vague references to “working people” or the “middle class.”

As he has throughout the presidential campaign, Sanders made no criticism of the record of the Obama administration and maintained a criminal silence on American militarism and the growing danger of war with Russia and China.

His declaration that he will continue the campaign through the final primaries and right up to the convention was a response to the intensified campaign by Democratic Party officials to drive him from the presidential contest, demanding that he acknowledge that Clinton has an insurmountable lead in convention delegates, largely due to her overwhelming support among “superdelegates,” the party officials and

officeholders who are not bound by the primary and caucus voting in their states.

Over the last several days, the corporate-controlled media has joined with the Democratic Party establishment in vilifying the conduct of Sanders supporters at the state Democratic convention in Nevada, portraying them as violent and disruptive. The obvious purpose of this propaganda campaign is to intimidate the Sanders campaign and push the candidate out of the race.



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