

# Clinton refuses to debate Sanders ahead of California primary

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On Monday, two weeks ahead of a primary election in California, the nation's largest state, and contests in four other states, the campaign of Hillary Clinton announced that the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination would not accept an invitation from Fox News to debate her challenger, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

A spokeswoman for the Clinton campaign issued a statement saying the former first lady, senator and secretary of state would contest the California primary while “turning our attention to the threat a Donald Trump presidency poses.” Suggesting that a televised debate with Sanders, who has won recent primaries in Indiana, West Virginia and Oregon and amassed 46 percent of pledged delegates awarded thus far, would be a diversion and waste of effort, the statement declared that Clinton's time would best be spent “preparing for a general election campaign that will ensure the White House remains in Democratic hands.”

Sanders, who accepted the offer of a debate last week and has been pressing Clinton to live up to a previous agreement to debate at least one more time before the end of the primary process next month, said he was “disappointed but not surprised” by Clinton's “unwillingness to debate before the largest and most important primary in the presidential nominating process.”

Clinton's refusal to debate Sanders is a statement of immense political weakness. It can only mean that she and her advisers have concluded an appearance with Sanders on nationwide television will cost her votes in California, New Jersey and the other states with pending primaries and caucuses. Their assessment is that Clinton's previous encounters with Sanders have been unsuccessful, only fueling popular distrust and hostility toward her and increasing support for her self-described “democratic socialist” challenger.

Far from welcoming an opportunity to put Sanders away in a pre-primary debate--in a state, moreover, where the polls have her leading by a double-digit margin--the conclusion appears to have been reached that the more the favorite of the Democratic establishment appears, the more unpopular

she becomes.

And for good reason. National polls released over the weekend show Clinton's lead over the presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump, rapidly eroding or disappearing entirely. The main contest between the two, according to polls conducted by both NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* and ABC News/*Washington Post*, is for the dubious honor of having the highest unfavorable rating in the history of pre-election polling. Both polls show the percentage of registered voters who have a negative opinion of the two frontrunners approaching 60 percent.

According to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll released last week, 64 percent of respondents said Clinton was not honest or trustworthy. Clinton and her ex-president husband are widely hated and despised, particularly by working people and youth. They are seen as corrupt personifications of a status quo dominated by Wall Street criminality and greed at home and war-mongering abroad.

It has not been lost on working people who face ever-worsening social conditions and declining living standards that the celebrated political couple parlayed their stints in political office into a multi-million-dollar fortune, at least \$150 million of it from speeches before Wall Street and corporate audiences.

The recent attempt by the Clinton campaign and the Democratic establishment, backed by large sections of the media, to witch-hunt the Sanders campaign and its supporters on the basis of fabricated charges of violence by Sanders delegates at the Nevada state Democratic convention appears to have backfired. On Tuesday, Harry Reid, the Democratic minority leader and senator from Nevada, called on Democratic officials to “lay off” of Sanders.

The Vermont senator continues to attract thousands of supporters, mainly young people, at rallies throughout California on the basis of his claim to be promoting a “political revolution” against Wall Street greed and economic inequality. Clinton, on the other hand, is limiting her campaign appearances to carefully vetted “organizing

events” and fundraisers, knowing that she would be unable to attract a significant turnout to larger venues. The only exceptions are speeches before trade union functionaries, such as her appearance Monday at the convention of the Service Employees International Union in Detroit and a speech to a conference of the United Food and Commercial Workers set for Thursday in Las Vegas.

The Clinton campaign and the Democratic Party establishment feel a visceral hatred for and fear of the social opposition that is finding an initial and transitory expression in support for Sanders. But beyond that, they are angered and frustrated that Sanders' continued presence is hindering Clinton from executing the sharp turn to the right her campaign is planning for the general election contest with Trump. This has already begun, with Clinton responding to Trump's emergence earlier this month as the presumptive Republican nominee by appealing for support among disaffected Republicans and attacking Trump as an unreliable “loose cannon” when it comes to US imperialist foreign policy.

Press commentaries published Tuesday openly discuss these concerns of the Clinton camp. The *Washington Post* wrote: “The resonance of his [Sanders'] message of economic populism--and his unwavering promise to stay in the race until July--have made it all but impossible for Clinton to turn fully to a general election contest against presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.”

Gerald F. Seib titled his “Capital Journal” column in the *Wall Street Journal* “Hillary Clinton's Complicated Path to Center,” writing: “There is a great opening for her in the ideological center of the presidential playing field,” but “Mrs. Clinton is trapped at the moment defending her left flank against continuing attacks from Mr. Sanders, and that figures to be the case right up until the Democratic convention at the end of July.”

In an attempt to appease Sanders' supporters and lure them behind Clinton, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) announced Monday that Sanders would name five members of the platform committee for the Democratic National Convention, which will be held at the end of July in Philadelphia. Clinton gets to name six members and DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz chooses the remaining four.

While Sanders hailed this as a major step toward reforming the Democratic Party, it is, in fact, a meaningless gesture. Nobody in American capitalist politics or the media takes seriously the convention platforms issued by the two parties of big business. It has been decades since they had any bearing on the policies carried out by the parties once they assume power. Obama did not even wait for his

inauguration to begin breaking all of the promises spelled out in his platform and putting in place an administration even more right-wing, militaristic and anti-democratic than that of his Republican predecessor.

As the *Washington Post* noted cynically, “most Democrats, not to mention most Americans, aren't going to be all that concerned with what's in the platform, an almost entirely symbolic document.”

The position of the Clinton campaign has a brazenly plutocratic character. It could be summed up as: “I am the chosen candidate of Wall Street and the intelligence/military complex. It doesn't matter who you vote for from here on out, or how much you despise me. You're stuck with me!”

As Clinton put it last week in an interview on CNN, “I will be the nominee for my party. That is already done, in effect. There is no way that I won't be.” While this is likely the case, with the Democratic frontrunner needing only 90 more delegates to lock in the nomination, such statements exude the conviction that the entire primary process—and, indeed, the election itself—is an annoying and embarrassing inconvenience that must be endured—for now, at least—to anoint the chosen chief executive of the ruling class.

This is despite the fact, according to polls, that Sanders would handily defeat the fascistic Trump in a one-on-one general election contest.

The Sanders campaign itself is part of the pseudo-democratic charade. From the outset, his aim has been to use his socialist pretensions and populist slogans to channel growing social opposition to the entire economic and political system behind the dead-end of the Democratic Party. Having served in Congress for nearly three decades as a nominal independent, but de facto loyal ally of the Democratic Party, Sanders is a known quantity whose services are valued by the ruling elite.

After Clinton announced her refusal to debate Sanders, Jeff Weaver, Sanders' campaign manager, reiterated the candidate's commitment to campaigning for the eventual Democratic nominee. He assured an interviewer that after the July convention, Sanders would hit the campaign trail in support of Clinton.



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