

The Beto O'Rourke campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination: “Nothing will come of nothing”

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16 March 2019

On Thursday former Texas congressman Beto O'Rourke became the 15th declared candidate for the 2020 Democratic Party presidential nomination. The 15th *so far*. There are more nonentities, hucksters and reactionaries to follow.

O'Rourke is a conventional American bourgeois politician. He attempts to make something out of his relative youth, “punk rock” background and tactical differences with ultra-reactionaries such as Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, against whom he ran for the US Senate seat in Texas in 2018.

But as Shakespeare’s King Lear once noted, ominously for everyone concerned as it turned out, “Nothing will come of nothing.”

O'Rourke’s three-minute video released Thursday announcing his candidacy for the 2020 nomination is presumably typical of what we can expect from him, i.e., a stream of stock phrases and empty generalities intended to be vaguely urgent, uplifting and optimistic without committing the candidate to anything.

Seated, with rolled-up sleeves, by his wordless, adoring wife and carefully emphasizing those words and phrases his advisors have presumably told him are vital to the success of his venture, O'Rourke began: “Amy and I are happy to share with you that I’m running to serve you as the next president of the United States of America. This is a defining moment of truth for this country and for every single one of us. The challenges that we face right now, the interconnected crises in our economy, our democracy and our climate have never been greater. And they will either consume us, or they will afford us the greatest opportunity to unleash the genius of the United States of America. In other words, this moment of peril produces perhaps the greatest moment of promise for this country and for everyone inside of it.”

Many viewers may not have been as pleased as O'Rourke and his wife to learn that he was selflessly and generously proposing to “serve” them as president. Indeed, the offer must have struck a good many as over-generous and even *uninvited*. Voices were heard to mutter, “No, thank you, on the whole, we’d rather you didn’t.”

Moreover, based on what we have seen so far of the Texas politician, including his recent video effort, it is not likely that O'Rourke will be part of that American “genius” he threatens to “unleash.”

O'Rourke’s primary claim to fame is making the Senate contest

with Cruz, a detestable figure, in 2018 a close one. That had little to do with O'Rourke, much less any “progressive” content to his campaign. Indeed, as the WSWS noted at the time, his candidacy was prominently endorsed by former CIA director John Brennan, arch-war criminal and defender of torture and drone missile assassinations. In addition, the three-term El Paso congressman won the backing of the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, three of the state’s most prominent newspapers and traditional supporters of Republican candidates, including George W. Bush.

In that 2018 race, O'Rourke was able to raise tens of millions of dollars from donors all over the US. Given the egotism and self-admiration of such types, it was perhaps inevitable that he drew the conclusion he had a vast following, rather than seeing his support as an expression of widespread revulsion at the semi-fascist Cruz.

In fact, both major parties are widely held in contempt. Following upon a presidential election in 2016 between the two most disliked candidates in US history, the general standing of Democratic and Republican politicians with the public remains at all-time lows. As of December 2018, the US Congress had an 18 percent job approval rating. A CNN headline in 2017 summed up the general situation: “Poll: Trump, Democrats and GOP all unpopular.”

There is no American politician, with the possible and mistaken exception of Sen. Bernie Sanders, associated with widely popular attacks on the “billionaire class,” who has a genuine base of support.

“Betomania” is a media concoction intended to deceive the population. Coinciding neatly with his presidential bid announcement, *Vanity Fair* magazine put O'Rourke—on a rural dirt road, dressed in jeans and in the company of a black Labrador—on the cover of its March 13 edition. The cover reads: “Beto’s Choice—‘I want to be in it. Man, I was born to be in it.’ His road to 2020 begins.” Those who fall for this sort of nonsense...

“Kennedy-esque,” “a fresh face,” “an inspirational speaker,” “untested but charismatic”—it goes on and on. According to *Politico*, O'Rourke has catapulted to become one of the Democratic Party’s most buzzed-about prospects.”

The Democratic Party specializes in coming up with “mavericks” with nothing unconventional about them,

“independents” joined at the hip to the corporate-financial elite and “populists” whose policies would further damage the population.

O’Rourke, a businessman whose real estate developer father-in-law is worth an estimated \$500 million (according to *Forbes*), recently affirmed his support for the existing economic system, the source of every social ill in America. The *Wall Street Journal* reported his comments: “I’m a capitalist … I don’t see how we’re able to meet any of the fundamental challenges that we have as a country without, in part, harnessing the power of the market. Climate change is the most immediate example of that. If you’re going to bring the total innovation and ingenuity of this country to bear … our economy is going to have to be a part of that.”

O’Rourke, promising a “people-powered campaign” and urging the building of “the greatest grassroots campaign ever,” could not even manage at a 2018 town hall to term himself a political “progressive.” He wretchedly explained, “I don’t know … I’m not big on labels. I don’t get all fired up about party or classifying or defining people based on a label or a group. I’m for everyone.” Or, as an Associated Press headline put it, “O’Rourke begins 2020 bid with big crowds, centrist message.”

His views on the anti-Russian campaign (he supported impeachment of Trump over his summit with Vladimir Putin), the military, immigration and every other major issue are in line, give or take, with the rest of the political establishment. He has criticized Trump’s fascistic ranting about Mexican immigrants but opposes amnesty for the undocumented and open borders and praises the current level of border “security,” which has led to the deaths of thousands of desperate people.

Even O’Rourke’s record on border walls, in opposition to which he recently led a well-publicized protest, in the words of the Associated Press, “is complicated. In March, he supported a spending package that other leading Democratic contenders opposed and included \$1.6 billion for border wall construction in Texas’ Rio Grande Valley and elsewhere. Buried in that was \$445 million for repairs of existing fencing elsewhere—including El Paso.” O’Rourke’s “action attracted criticism from people who know the border best. Scott Nicol, co-chairman of the Sierra Club’s Borderlands team, called it ‘very disappointing.’”

O’Rourke apparently hopes to follow in the footsteps of Barack Obama, a largely unknown individual with little political history who was picked up by powerful economic and state interests and packaged for the benefit of the public as the candidate of “change.”

Following his Thursday video release, the *Atlantic* noted in a headline that O’Rourke “wants to be Obama.” The magazine commented: “A long time ago already, Obama became a celebrity himself, propelled to run for president mostly because of one amazing convention speech, and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize without seeming to have done all that much to earn it other than win the Electoral College and not be George W. Bush.”

The article also observed that in his video announcement O’Rourke “gave no specifics on how he’d do anything he wants to do, or even exactly what that might be … other than a long pledge to uplift people and bring the country together, instead of tearing it apart, as Trump has. Nor did he give specifics at his first

event, in Iowa later in the morning and carried live on cable—he talked about health care but didn’t mention ‘Medicare for all’ or any alternative. He was asked about the Green New Deal but talked generally about the climate as he addressed ‘the spirit of the question.’ There are T-shirts and hats for sale online, with just his first name. It’s not up on hotels or towers anywhere, but no other Democrat running is famous enough to be quite such a brand.”

In other words, without fully meaning to, the *Atlantic* piece paints the portrait of a political charlatan, an empty vessel who will be at the service of the oligarchy.

Not everyone is happy with O’Rourke. The *New York Times*, speaking for upper-middle-class layers obsessed with gender and race, expressed disappointment with the entrance of a white male into the Democratic presidential mix.

One *Times* piece observed Friday that the “charismatic” Texas Democrat’s “three-minute clip quickly racked up thousands of shares, with some viewers excited by the prospect of his out-of-nowhere political rise. But others were put off by how his campaign deployed an age-old trope in American political theater—the silent, supportive wife. …

“Mr. O’Rourke’s video struck some observers as especially out of place in a presidential race in which more Democratic women are running for president than ever before. Among several of these women, the husbands are rarely seen.”

Another *Times* column March 15 noted somberly that some “voters and activists have also wondered aloud if a white man is the best fit for this Democratic moment, particularly after midterm successes powered often by female and nonwhite candidates.”

O’Rourke is as good “a fit” as any of the other big-business politicians in the race, all vying to become the highest political representative in charge of “managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

The fraud of the O’Rourke candidacy brings out sharply and dramatically the desiccation of the American political system, its alienation from the broad mass of the population and the antidemocratic character of the entire electoral process.



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