

Bloomberg, Steyer spend \$200 million on Democratic nomination fight

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The two billionaire candidates seeking the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party have already spent more than \$200 million, accorded to figures reported by *Politico* this week, at least three times the combined spending of all other Democratic candidates.

Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York City, is the ninth richest person in the United States, with a \$58 billion fortune derived from his media and information technology empire. Tom Steyer, a former hedge fund operator, is reportedly worth about \$2 billion.

Steyer has spent \$83 million on advertising since he entered the race in July. Bloomberg has easily surpassed that total, pumping more than \$120 million into media buys since he announced his candidacy last month.

The two candidates are pursuing opposite tactics in their vote-buying. Steyer has run a conventional campaign targeting the four early-voting states: Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina. All four hold caucuses or primaries in February.

Bloomberg is skipping the four early states and focusing instead on the two-thirds of Democratic convention delegates who will be selected between March 3 and March 17. Given the scale of the voting, television and internet advertising will be the principal means of reaching voters. Bloomberg has already spent \$13 million per state on advertising in California, Texas and Florida, the three biggest states among the March contests.

Nearly a year before the 2020 election, Bloomberg is advertising at a saturation level.

He launched his campaign with a media blitz in the final week of November that cost \$33 million, more than the \$25 million President Barack Obama's

campaign spent in the final week of his 2012 reelection campaign.

In many US cities, it is impossible to turn on the television or log onto the internet without seeing a commercial for Bloomberg. In one small market, Wilmington, North Carolina, Bloomberg ads have run up to 36 times a day on some stations.

Bloomberg has also begun to hire campaign operatives from the defunct campaigns of other rivals, including Beto O'Rourke and Kamala Harris, offering as much as double or triple the salaries.

In barely a month, Bloomberg has spent more than twice the combined advertising of every non-billionaire candidate in the Democratic field for the entire year. In the four early-voting states, Steyer has spent \$37 million, twice as much as the combined spending of the four leading candidates—former Vice President Joe Biden, Senator Bernie Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren and former South Bend, Indiana, mayor Pete Buttigieg.

The figures are stark: \$120 million for Bloomberg, \$83 million for Steyer, less than \$60 million for the two dozen others, including six senators, three governors and five members of the House of Representatives. Buttigieg, who was the third-highest spender, paid for \$19 million in advertising for the entire year.

So far, neither candidate has seen any obvious return on investment. Polls in the four early-voting states show Steyer at five percent or less in each, while Bloomberg's massive and virtually nationwide media effort has pushed him up to seven percent in some polls. These figures would put either billionaire no higher than fifth in any state.

Bloomberg received a serious blow this week when the *Intercept* reported that his presidential campaign had hired a call center company that uses prison labor

in Oklahoma as part of its operations. The company, ProCom, contracted with prisoners at a women's prison in Oklahoma, the Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center, to make calls to California voters. The callers had to disclose at the end of any conversation with voters that they were contacting them on behalf of the Bloomberg campaign, but they did not have to reveal that they were calling them from a prison.

According to ProCom, the company pays the state Department of Corrections \$7.25 an hour, the Oklahoma minimum wage, for each prisoner's time. The Department of Corrections keeps most of the money, turning over a pittance to the prisoners. One study from 2017 found that Oklahoma prisoners received about 54 cents an hour for such contract work.

The Bloomberg campaign admitted that prisoners had been used to make calls on its behalf and announced it had terminated the deal with ProCom. Bloomberg posted an apology on his Twitter account conceding that the *Intercept* report had been correct.

Given the enormous popular hostility to the domination of American life by billionaires, which has found a distorted expression in the campaigns of both Sanders and Warren, it would require more than just unlimited amounts of money to win the presidency for Bloomberg or Steyer.

There are, of course, more billionaires in America than these two, and many of them are politically engaged in supporting one or another Democratic hopeful. Sanders claimed during last week's debate in Los Angeles that 44 billionaires were supporting Biden and 39 were supporting Buttigieg, while he proclaimed that no billionaires were supporting him.

Warren also sought to strike an anti-billionaire pose at the debate, attacking Buttigieg for consorting with millionaires and billionaires at a fundraiser and declaring, "Billionaires in wine caves should not pick the next president of the United States."

Buttigieg retorted that he was the only person on the stage "who is not a millionaire or a billionaire." He pointed out that Warren had held similar big money fundraisers during her Senate campaigns and concluded, "This is the problem with issuing purity tests you cannot yourself pass."

The truth is that all of the Democratic candidates, billionaires and non-billionaires alike, are hardened defenders of American capitalism, the economic system

that produces billionaires and mass impoverishment and social misery, side by side.

Even the most demagogic and supposedly "left" of the candidates, Sanders and Warren, propose only infinitesimal increases in taxes on the super-rich (Warren's panacea is a two percent levy on wealth), while leaving the overall operation of the profit system, and the domination of giant banks and corporations, otherwise intact.



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