

Sanders wins sweeping victory in Nevada

Patrick Martin
23 February 2020

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders won a sweeping victory in Saturday's Democratic Party caucuses in Nevada, defeating his closest rival, former Vice President Joe Biden, by a two-to-one margin and amassing 46 percent of the county convention delegates in an eight-candidate field.

The victory makes Sanders a strong front-runner to win the Democratic nomination ahead of the March 3 "Super Tuesday" contests, in which nearly 1,400 convention delegates will be selected.

Sanders is leading in the two largest states voting March 3, California and Texas, and is on track to win delegates in all of the more than 160 congressional districts where voting will take place.

More than 110,000 people cast ballots in the Nevada caucuses, with the final total likely to break the previous record, set in 2008 when Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton fought to a near-draw in the state. Sanders' support in the initial vote—essentially the popular vote among caucus-goers—was 33 percent, compared to 17 percent for Biden, 16 percent for Pete Buttigieg, former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, and 13 percent for Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Senator Amy Klobuchar was in fifth place, with 10 percent, and billionaire Tom Steyer, who pumped \$15 million into television advertising in the thinly-populated state, trailed with 9 percent.

The breadth and depth of the support for Sanders was summed up in this paragraph from the *New York Times*—a newspaper that has intransigently opposed Sanders throughout his political career, and recently endorsed Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Amy Klobuchar for the nomination.

After noting the failure of several other candidates to win support among diverse sections of the population, the *Times* admitted: "Only Mr. Sanders, with his uncompromising message that working-class Americans affected by injustice can unite across ethnic identity, has shown traction in both predominantly white Iowa and New Hampshire and the more black and brown Nevada."

According to entrance polls, in which voters were interviewed as they went into caucus sites, Sanders won virtually every demographic—young, middle-aged and old, white, Latino and Asian, very liberal, liberal and moderate. African-American voters, about 10 percent of the total in Nevada, placed him second, narrowly behind Biden.

Sanders won despite two major political provocations carried out over the past week, engineered by the Democratic Party establishment with the assistance of the intelligence agencies and the corporate media.

The week before the vote was dominated by claims from the leadership of Culinary Workers Local 226, the giant local union whose members constitute the bulk of the workforce at the Las Vegas casinos and hotels, that Sanders' advocacy of "Medicare for all" would take away their union-sponsored health insurance.

The rank-and-file workers ignored this "big lie" campaign, as Sanders won seven of the nine caucus sites set up on the Las Vegas Strip for workers to cast votes during their work shifts, and tied Biden in the eighth. There were anecdotal reports of union officials trying to convince workers to remove their "Unidos con Sanders" stickers and the workers refusing.

On Friday, on the eve of the caucuses, came an even bigger provocation—claims from US intelligence agencies, trumpeted by the media, that Russian President Vladimir Putin was intervening in the US presidential campaign to support Sanders. These claims were made with no evidence, consisting of mere assertions citing mostly unnamed intelligence officials.

About two-thirds of the caucus vote had already been cast in early voting, before the claims about Russian interference were broadcast. But there is every indication that the only effect of this campaign was to anger Sanders' voters and make them more determined to support him—as shown both in the entrance polling and in interviews with voters lined up to enter the caucus sites.

The trade unions, which have for decades imposed concessions onto their rank-and-file membership while granting large salaries and perks to their officials, are reviled by broad sections of the American working class. And the statements of the US intelligence agencies, who fabricated the justification for the war in Iraq, are treated with equal skepticism.

Sanders delivered a victory speech, not in Nevada, but in San Antonio, Texas, where he was campaigning ahead of the March 3 vote. He made no mention of any of his rivals for the Democratic nomination, but gave what amounted to a general election campaign speech directed against Trump, focusing on the growth of economic inequality and social injustice in America.

He declared, "Healthcare is a human right, not a privilege,"

called for reliance on “science, not right-wing extremism” in addressing climate change, and identified himself as the son of an immigrant who would “on the first day, rescind all Trump executive orders” and “end the demonization of immigrants.”

The response to Sanders’ victory on the part of the Democratic Party establishment and its media backers has been to double down on the narrative that Sanders is a communist whose campaign is being supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin in order to deliver the general election to President Trump.

The most explicit statements came from media pundits drawn from the right-wing of the Democratic Party. Former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, also former chief of staff in the Obama White House, declared, “politics is about picking your opponent,” saying that Putin and Trump were backing Sanders because he would insure a sweeping Republican victory both in the presidential election and in the Senate and House of Representatives.

On MSNBC, in a scene of near-frenzy against Sanders, Chris Matthews, a former top congressional Democratic aide, compared Sanders’ victory in Nevada to the Nazi defeat of France in 1940. Matthews has previously suggested that the victory of a self-proclaimed socialist would lead to “executions in Central Park.”

Another MSNBC contributor, Joy Reid, spoke in worried tones of the “sheer unadulterated rage” of young voters. “They’re turning the tables over and they don’t care what the potential result is. They’re the hungriest,” she said. “No one is as hungry, angry, enraged and determined as Sanders voters. Democrats need to sober up and figure out what the hell they are going to do about that.”

Two of Sanders’ rivals gave “concession” speeches which, far from congratulating the Nevada winner, presented him as an existential threat. Former Vice President Biden, in a typically garbled statement, claimed a “comeback” for finishing second, after fourth-place and fifth-place finishes in Iowa and New Hampshire. “Y’all did it for me,” he told supporters in Las Vegas. “I ain’t a socialist. I’m not a plutocrat. I’m a Democrat, and proud of it.”

Buttigieg, a former naval intelligence officer deployed in Afghanistan, let loose an extremely right-wing diatribe, declaring, “Senator Sanders believes in an inflexible ideological revolution that leaves out most Democrats, not to mention most Americans.”

He explicitly decried Sanders’ “vision of capitalism as the root of all evil,” and his call for policies that “would go beyond reform and reorder the economy in ways that most Democrats, not to mention most Americans, don’t support.”

The clear meaning of Buttigieg’s comments was a message to the Democratic Party establishment and the financial aristocracy to get behind his campaign as the only way of preventing social upheaval. He warned that Sanders was engaged in “consolidating one extreme faction,” while he

advocated “growing an American majority that is united not only by who we are against.”

Translated into plain language, he was calling for an end to attacks on the billionaires, and urging the billionaires—including, by implication, Democratic candidate Michael Bloomberg—to give him their support.

The Bloomberg campaign, in its turn, argued for all other “moderate” Democrats to unite behind him. An internal campaign projection was leaked to the *Washington Post* forecasting that Sanders would win big on Super Tuesday, with primaries that day “delivering him a lead of 350 to 400 out of 1,357 delegates set to be awarded unless race dynamics change.”

The *Post* reported that a private poll “paid for by a rival presidential candidate,” likely Bloomberg, had tested the following negative message: “Bernie Sanders is a socialist who supports un-American, big government plans that will spend trillions of dollars, lead to higher taxes, and destroy our way of life.”

Sanders, as he has throughout his political career, is adapting to these intensifying pressures from the Democratic establishment and the corporate elite. A campaign co-chairman, Representative Ro Khanna of California, told the *Post* that the senator was “not going to have an iron fist” if he became the nominee, and would allow Democratic congressional and Senate candidates to openly oppose his policies if they thought it necessary for their own campaigns.

Khanna claimed Sanders’ economic program could win support in affluent suburban areas that shifted to the Democrats in the 2018 congressional election. “You can talk about these issues in a way that is pro-economic growth. You can talk about these policies in a way that is pro-business,” he said. “What I believe is that he is going to get extraordinary turnout for our party at the top of the ticket. He is going to connect with working class voters who Trump took from us last time, and then every candidate can tailor their message to their districts.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact