

On eve of South Carolina and “Super Tuesday” primaries

Democratic establishment steps up campaign against Sanders

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29 February 2020

On the eve of the South Carolina primary, and with three days remaining before the “Super Tuesday” primaries in 14 states, the Democratic Party establishment and its media allies are stepping up their attacks on the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, the frontrunner for the party’s presidential nomination.

On Thursday, Democratic members of the House of Representatives went to the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee for a briefing on their role as “superdelegates” to the party’s nominating convention, set for July in Milwaukee.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi claimed the meeting was purely “technical,” but she emphasized that whoever won the nomination, House candidates would not be bound to support their political platform. “It’s not unusual for the party platform or the candidates for president to have their own agenda that they would put forth. And it’s not unusual for the House of Representatives to have its agenda as well,” she said. “We have to win in certain particular areas... we are district by district.”

There has been increasing commentary in the media and from leading Democrats about the possibility of a “brokered convention” if Sanders wins more delegates than any other candidate but falls short of an absolute majority of 1,991 elected delegates on the first ballot at the convention.

Under party rules, the 776 unelected superdelegates cannot vote on that first ballot, but do have voting rights on any subsequent ballot. The total required for victory will rise to 2,376 on the second ballot, raising the prospect of delegates supporting non-Sanders candidates joining forces with the superdelegates to push through an alternative nominee.

According to Wikipedia, the superdelegates include:

- 30 distinguished party leaders (DPL), consisting of current and former presidents, current and former vice-presidents, former congressional leaders, and former DNC chairs
- 236 Democratic members of the House of Representatives, including non-voting delegates from the District of Columbia and territories such as Guam and the Virgin Islands
- 48 members of the United States Senate, including 45 Democrats, two independents who caucus with the Democrats

(one of them Sanders) and a Washington DC “shadow” senator

- 28 Democratic governors (including territorial governors and the mayor of Washington DC)
- 438 members of the Democratic National Committee and the chairs and vice-chairs of the 50 state Democratic parties (with 434 votes).

An article published in the *New York Times* Friday, under the headline “Key Democrats Willing to Open Party to Bruises to Stop Sanders,” is based on interviews with 93 of these superdelegates, a substantial proportion. It reports that the vast majority are so opposed to Sanders that they are “willing to risk intraparty damage to stop his nomination at the national convention in July if they get the chance.”

Only nine of the 93 interviewed are supporting Sanders for the nomination. Only eight of the 236 Democratic members of the House support Sanders, and only one other senator does, his colleague from Vermont, Patrick Leahy. Former Vice President Joe Biden, by contrast, has the support of 50 members of the House, while nearly two dozen support billionaire Michael Bloomberg.

Among those quoted opposing Sanders’ claim that he should become the nominee if he wins the most delegates, even if he falls short of an absolute majority, are former Vice President Walter Mondale, representatives Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey and Veronica Escobar of Texas, and Jay Jacobs, chairman of the New York State Democratic Party.

“Bernie wants to redefine the rules and just say he just needs a plurality,” Jacobs told the *Times*. “I don’t think we buy that. I don’t think the mainstream of the Democratic Party buys that. If he doesn’t have a majority, it stands to reason that he may not become the nominee.”

“People are worried,” former Senator Christopher Dodd, a former chairman of the DNC, told the *Times*. “How you can spend four or five months hoping you don’t have to put a bumper sticker from that guy on your car.”

The article reported numerous phone calls to Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio, who decided last year not to enter the presidential contest, urging him to make himself available for a “draft” in the event of a deadlocked nominating convention.

Brown did not rule out the idea in a statement given to the Cleveland-area media on Thursday.

The discussion of a brokered convention is based upon projections that Sanders will win a huge number of delegates but slightly less than an absolute majority on March 3, dubbed “Super Tuesday” because there are primaries in 14 states. Democratic Party rules provide for proportional representation for any candidate winning more than 15 percent of the vote either statewide, in a congressional district, or in Texas, in a state senate district.

While Biden remains in the lead in South Carolina according to polls ahead of tomorrow’s balloting, that state accounts for only 54 delegates, which are likely to be split between Biden, Sanders and billionaire Tom Steyer, who has poured \$20 million into television and internet advertising in the state. A defeat for Biden would effectively end his campaign.

Three days later, about 1,350 delegates will be selected in the “Super Tuesday” primaries. Polls suggest that Sanders is likely to win the most votes in at least nine of the 14 states, including the two largest overall, California and Texas, as well as in Virginia, North Carolina, Utah, Colorado, Vermont, Maine and Massachusetts, which could give him more than 600 of the delegates chosen that day.

The remaining 750 delegates could be split among as many as seven rivals: Biden, Bloomberg, Steyer, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Amy Klobuchar, former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg and Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii.

According to polls, Klobuchar is currently leading in her home state of Minnesota, while Biden leads in Oklahoma. Warren runs no better than second anywhere, including her home state, Massachusetts, where Sanders held an eight-point lead in the most recent poll. There is no recent polling in Alabama, Arkansas or Tennessee, where Bloomberg is advertising heavily while Sanders has an organized network of supporters and Biden has the backing of local Democratic Party officeholders and officials.

The disparity in resources among the campaigns is strikingly demonstrated in the advertising totals for the 14 “Super Tuesday” states. According to one tabulation, Bloomberg has spent \$218 million in the 14 states, including \$78 million in California and \$53 million in Texas. Steyer has spent \$41 million, including \$33 million in California and \$5 million in Texas. Sanders has spent \$15.5 million, including \$7 million in California and \$3.8 million in Texas.

The other candidates have spent far less: Klobuchar—\$4.5 million, Warren—\$3.6 million, Buttigieg—\$2.6 million (but only \$25,000 in the final week), and Biden—\$625,000, including a derisory \$4,000 on internet advertising directed at California, his only media purchase in the largest state. NBC News reported that Biden has 500 staff in place in the 14 Super Tuesday states, compared to 1,300 for Warren, 1,000 for Sanders and 950 for Bloomberg.

Without a sharp shift in the expected vote results, Klobuchar, Buttigieg and Gabbard are likely to leave the race soon, while Warren would be under heavy pressure to do so if she loses her home state of Massachusetts to Sanders. Only the two billionaires have the resources to continue indefinitely, although it is not clear where Steyer would win even one delegate on Super Tuesday.

The media coverage of the crisis of the Democratic Party establishment is premised on the claim that Sanders as the nominee, because of his identification as a socialist, would prove deeply unpopular and would lose badly to Trump, dragging down Democratic congressional and Senate candidates with him.

Sanders argues that only he can bring more workers and young people to the polls and channel growing popular opposition to the economic and political system back behind the Democratic Party.

Washington Post columnist E. J. Dionne was compelled to admit that young people, both in college and in the work force, were moving sharply to the left. “And it may come as a surprise,” he wrote, “but Sanders’s embrace of ‘democratic socialism’ is actually helping him solidify this bloc in the primaries. There are good reasons why young Americans have a far more favorable view of socialism and a more skeptical view of capitalism than their elders. Those under 35 came of age in the wake of the economic system’s near implosion in the Great Recession, and capitalism simply doesn’t look as good to them in 2020 as it did to the younger generation of, say, 1998.”

The real goal of the Democratic Party establishment and its media allies is to suppress this leftward movement among workers and youth by any means necessary, including by embracing the most blatantly anti-democratic methods, such as a rigged party convention.



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