

Clinton, Sanders Clash Intensifies in New York

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Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton lashed out on several occasions Thursday against supporters of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and critics of her right-wing political record, amid reports suggesting that her poll lead in both New York state and nationally has become precarious.

A Quinnipiac University poll released Thursday showed Clinton leading Sanders by only 54 percent to 42 percent in New York, the state she represented for eight years in the US Senate. This means Sanders has wiped out three-quarters of Clinton's 48-point lead, 71 percent to 23 percent, in an Emerson College survey earlier in March.

Even a poll giving her a 12-point lead showed Clinton with a net unfavorable rating, 45 percent to 49 percent among likely Democratic voters, while Sanders have a net favorable rating of 24 points, 54 percent to 30 percent.

The New York primary April 19 will award 291 delegates to the Democratic nominating convention, the second largest number of any state. A Clinton defeat in New York would be catastrophic for her campaign, and set the stage for further defeats April 26, when five states in the same region vote: Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Rhode Island, accounting for another 384 delegates.

The Clinton campaign began the New York phase of the campaign with a rally Wednesday in Harlem. The decision to shift focus to that state amounted to conceding the April 5 Wisconsin primary, where Sanders now has a lead of six-eight points in public polls, and is believed by both campaigns to be safely ahead.

Sanders responded by launching his own New York primary campaign Thursday night with a huge rally at St. Mary's Park in the South Bronx, attended by an estimated 18,500 people, many of them black and Latino. The location of the kickoff rally and the endorsers who shared the stage with the candidate, including actress Rosario Dawson and director Spike Lee, marked a deliberate effort by the Sanders campaign to appeal to minority voters in New York City, who could well decide the outcome of the primary.

Claiming that he would support more resources going to the Bronx and other impoverished urban communities, Sanders described his own background growing up in a Jewish immigrant neighborhood in Brooklyn. "I learned a little bit about what it means to grow up in a family that has no money and I also learned a little bit about the immigrant experience," he said.

Sanders made his now-familiar denunciation of "Wall Street crooks" and billionaires, while demanding Clinton release transcripts of speeches she delivered to audiences at Goldman

Sachs and other top financial firms for six-figure fees. He said sarcastically, “If you’re going to get paid \$250,000 for a speech, it must be a brilliant speech. It must be an Earth-shattering speech written in Shakespearean prose.”

Speaking on CBS “Morning News” Friday, Sanders cited the large turnout at the Bronx rally as evidence that his campaign had broad support. “We are going to win New York,” he said, the first time his campaign has suggested it could actually defeat Clinton in the state she was twice elected to the US Senate. “We’re going to do rallies all over the state, and I think we have a good shot at this,” he said.

Clinton has encountered unexpected public opposition at several New York campaign appearances. Speaking Thursday at the SUNY Purchase in suburban Westchester County, she was interrupted by pro-Sanders hecklers among the college students, who chanted, “She wins, we lose,” and then marched demonstratively out of the auditorium.

Clinton then told the SUNY Purchase audience that Sanders was making unrealistic promises to win support among young people. He “goes around telling young people that he’s going to give them free college. Well, I wish it were so.” The result, she said, was that young Sanders supporters “won’t listen to anybody else,” and didn’t want to hear “the contrast between my experience, my plans, my vision, what I know I can get done and what my opponent is promising.”

A few hours later, Clinton became visibly angry when an organizer for Greenpeace USA, Eva Resnick-Day, confronted her along a rope line about contributions to her campaign from figures in the fossil fuel industry. Clinton denied taking money “from people who work for fossil fuel companies,” then exploded, “I am so sick of the Sanders campaign lying about that,” pointing her finger at the questioner.

Greenpeace later released figures showing that Clinton has received donations bundled by 57 fossil fuel industry lobbyists that total more than \$1.1 million. Much larger sums, at least \$3.4 million, have been funneled by the industry into Priorities USA Action, the Super PAC supporting Clinton. The environmental organization noted that it has not endorsed Sanders, but has repeatedly challenged all candidates not to take money from oil, coal and natural gas industry.

Clinton has the backing of virtually the entire New York state Democratic Party apparatus, including Senator Charles Schumer, Harlem Congressman Charles Rangel and unions like the United Federation of Teachers, Service Employees International Union and building trades.

The primary is limited to registered Democrats, meaning that independent voters, who have given Sanders margins of 70 percent or more, cannot cast ballots in New York. The Sanders campaign spent much of its efforts in New York urging young people and other registered independents to re-register in the Democratic Party before the March 25 deadline to vote in the primary.

Washington Post columnist Eugene Robinson, who has previously downplayed Sanders’ chances, wrote Friday, “If not for a certain Manhattan billionaire, Bernie Sanders’s surprising strength and Hillary Clinton’s relative weakness would be the big political story of the year.” Clinton has won in 18 states, while Sanders has taken 14, making the contest far more competitive than expected.

The weakness of the Democratic frontrunner was increasingly obvious, he wrote: "... look at the bigger picture: It's April and Clinton has not managed to put away a 74-year-old avowed socialist who wasn't even a Democrat until he began his campaign. Why is that not worrisome?"

The Sanders campaign has won a response among millions of young people and sections of the working class, revealing a broad shift to the left in the thinking of working people, and their turn to a political program described by the candidate and the media as "socialist." At the same time, Sanders himself remains a conventional capitalist politician, whose policies would not touch the foundations of the profit system, and go no further than the liberalism that was standard in the Democratic Party 50 or 60 years ago, but has long been discarded as the Democrats moved steadily to the right.

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