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ClimateWire

SUSTAINABILITY

Bernie Sanders Singles Out Climate Change in Victory Speech

And a supporter says if Sanders is elected president he could usher in a carbon tax

By Evan Lehmann, ClimateWire on February 10, 2016



Democratic presidential candidate, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., reacts to the cheering crowd at his primary night rally Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2016, in Manchester, N.H. AP Photo/J. David Ake

CONCORD, N.H. -- Sen. Bernie Sanders sailed to an overwhelming victory in the New Hampshire Democratic primary last night, delivering a stinging blow to Hillary Clinton and promising to prolong the surprisingly tight nominating contest.

Sanders vowed in a triumphant speech in a packed high school here to reform the "oligarchy" caused by Wall Street excess and to attack climate change by severely limiting the use of fossil fuels.

"It is already causing devastating problems in this country and around the world," he said of rising temperatures.

Sanders exceeded expectations here by attracting large majorities of independent and young voters, who carried him to victory with a 22-point margin. The Vermont senator gained 60 percent of the vote to Clinton's 38 percent.

The showing bolstered the confidence of Sanders' supporters, some of whom stood in 15-degree weather outside the overflowing high school in this town studded by church spires. They see his victory and the energy surrounding his campaign as a key to improving turnout among younger voters.

Abel Collins, a 37-year-old who canvassed for Sanders yesterday, spoke optimistically about how as the nominee Sanders could drive success across the ballot, potentially giving control of the Senate back to Democrats. That might lead to the unlikely passage of a carbon tax, Collins said.

He doesn't see that happening under a Clinton presidency.

"Clinton is a lightning rod," Collins said. "She'll probably be impeached."

The former secretary of State tried to close the gap with Sanders over the last week. Instead, she lost key constituencies by huge margins. More than 80 percent of women under 30 chose Sanders over Clinton, according to exit polls. Sanders also won independents by 45 percentage points.

"I know I have some work to do, particularly with young people," Clinton admitted in a speech last night that looked ahead to brighter days in contests that favor her over Sanders.

TRUMP 'PRACTICAL,' BUT DISAGREEMENTS ON CLIMATE

At snowy voting precincts yesterday, Clinton supporters beamed with confidence about her candidacy, with some saying that Sanders is overpromising on policies that he won't be able to deliver.

Kate Nolte, 32, said Clinton has a "proven record" and will be able to advance action on climate change, which she says ranks near the top of her concerns.

"He's really interesting to listen to," she said of Sanders. "I just don't know if he could do it."

The Republican results also shuffled the deck. Donald Trump got his first win with 35 percent of the vote, followed by Ohio Gov. John Kasich with 16 percent, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz with 11.6 percent, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush with 11.1 percent, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio with 10.6 percent, and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie with 7.5 percent. Carly Fiorina and Ben Carson each finished with less than 5 percent.

Trump's finish thrusts him into the lead after a disappointing showing in Iowa last week. But some political observers say Kasich's second-place finish might be more meaningful, in that it may deplete Rubio's momentum coming out of Iowa.

The support behind Trump and Sanders was palpable yesterday in some stretches of the state.

In Salem, a small town along the border of Massachusetts, multiple voters cited different reasons for backing the billionaire real estate tycoon. None of them pointed to his opposition to climate science as a driver of their support.

Melissa Szymansky, a speech pathologist, likes Trump's tough approach to illegal immigration. She said undocumented people are "getting free handouts." She also wants to see more renewable energy.

Derek Sullivan, a veteran who served in Iraq, pointed to Trump's support of the military. Asked if he agrees with Trump that man-made climate change is overblown, Sullivan paused behind his sunglasses.

"I would really have to look into it before I say anything," he said.

And John Toomey, a 64-year-old businessman, said Trump is "practical" and would add a healthy dose of efficiency to federal budgeting and programs. He also thinks the tycoon is more compassionate than he appears on television. Toomey wasn't aware that Trump questions the integrity of climate science.

"I think climate change is something that's there. How we live definitely affects it," Toomey said. "I think we can be more active about it."

HIPPIE SONGS AND SKEPTICISM

Along the mountain ridges 30 miles to the north, Sanders supporters were celebrating in downtown Concord by early afternoon. A group of them sang folk songs along Green Street.

"This land is your land, this land is my land," they sang as a man played guitar. "This land was made for you and me."

Some political observers anticipated a softer showing for Cruz in New Hampshire, where Republican voters tend to be less religious and more moderate. Cruz crafts his message to appeal to evangelicals and tea party supporters.

There's a core of conservative voters in the Granite State who identify with the tea party. They stand out on the climate issue. About 23 percent of tea party supporters believe that people contribute to global warming, according to a study published in the journal *Environmental Politics* last year. That's 10 percentage points below other Republicans in the state who say it's caused by humans.

"We're living on a molten rock; what do you expect?" said Gerard Fauvel, 67, after voting for Cruz. "The earth's core is filled with lava. We're gonna have some warming."

The moderate characteristics of New Hampshire voters carry over to climate change. A series of 21 statewide surveys between 2010 and 2015 shows that 58 percent of residents believe that global warming is caused by people. That's higher than the national average by a few points.

Some experts say that can be meaningful in close elections.

Jon Krosnick, a professor of communication and political science at Stanford University, has identified 6 to 7 percent of Republican voters in national polls who rank climate as a very important issue. This subset can be swayed, he says, by candidates who talk agreeably about acting to address warming.

The opposite is also true. He points to efforts by Trump and Cruz to describe climate science as misleading.

"But here's the thing. They just lost themselves a bunch of votes -- a lot of votes -- from independents and Democrats by taking this skeptical position on climate change," Krosnick said last week. "In my opinion, it's self-defeating."

Trump and Cruz could see other benefits. Both are aiming for the support of evangelical voters, and challenging the state of climate science could help them burnish their conservative credentials. It might also help them raise money from conservative donors, Krosnick said.

Other candidates appealed to the moderate streak of New Hampshire voters. Nearly half of all GOP primary voters describe themselves as independent.

Bush was applauded loudly on Sunday when he told more than 200 people attending a town hall in Salem that it's "impossible" that people aren't affecting the climate. He talked about how mellover winters have recently hurt the moose population here by failing to reduce the number of ticks. He also talked about the impacts of sea-level rise in his state of Florida.

"It is reasonable for people to look over the horizon and plan for these things," Bush said. "You have to plan -- maybe not for the apocalypse -- but you can plan for the possibility that is reality-based. So in Florida, that might mean changing our growth management laws. Here, it might mean something different. So adaptation should be the policies that are bottom-up. The federal government needs to provide a constructive role for providing support for that process."

Reporter Benjamin Hulac contributed.

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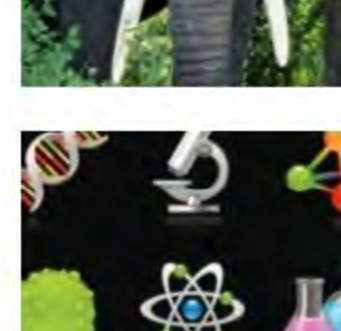
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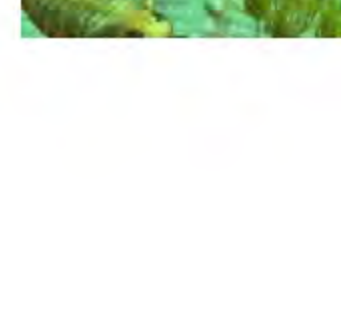
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