

Bernie Sanders: A Biography

David Kaspar

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Bernie Sanders is an American politician and the junior United States senator from Vermont. He is a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States in the 2016 election. A member of the Democratic Party since 2015, Sanders had been the longest-serving independent in U.S. congressional history, though his caucusing with the Democrats entitled him to committee assignments and at times gave Democrats a majority. Sanders became the ranking minority member on the Senate Budget Committee in January 2015; he had previously served for two years as chair of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Sanders was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York City, and graduated from the University of Chicago in 1964. While a student he was an active civil rights protest organizer for the Congress of Racial Equality and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. After settling in Vermont in 1968, Sanders ran unsuccessful third-party campaigns for governor and U.S. senator in the early to mid-1970s. As an independent, he was elected mayor of Burlington—Vermont's most populous city—in 1981, where he was reelected three times. In 1990 he was elected to represent Vermont's at-large congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1991 Sanders co-founded the Congressional Progressive Caucus. He served as a congressman for 16 years before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 2006. In 2012, he was reelected with 71% of the popular vote.

Sanders rose to national prominence following his 2010 filibuster against the proposed extension of the Bush tax cuts. He favors policies similar to those of social democratic parties in Europe, particularly those instituted by the Nordic countries, and has built a reputation as a leading progressive voice on issues such as campaign finance reform, corporate welfare, global warming, income inequality, LGBT rights, parental leave, and universal healthcare. Sanders has long been critical of U.S. foreign policy and was an early and outspoken opponent of the Iraq War. He is also outspoken on civil liberties and civil rights, particularly criticizing racial discrimination in the criminal justice system as well as advocating for privacy rights against mass surveillance policies such as the USA PATRIOT Act and the NSA surveillance programs.

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