

Sanders shocker could widen field

by Mitch Henck

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The late Democratic National Committee Chairman Bob Straus said, “A day is a lifetime in politics.”

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont rocked at the Dane County Coliseum on July 1 in front of a near-sellout crowd. His call for free public universities and single-payer health care drew roars from the biggest crowd in the 2016 race.

When Hillary Clinton re-launched her campaign on Roosevelt Island in New York in June, the grandstand for an overflow crowd was not necessary.

Brett Hulsey, a former Democratic state representative from Madison, remembers an enthusiasm gap for Hillary Clinton in Iowa in 2008. A veteran of the war room with James Carville in 1992 in Little Rock, Arkansas, Hulsey was a Hillary Clinton delegate in 2008. In 2016, he backs Sanders.

“I grew tired of the corporate politics,” says Hulsey. He says Clinton has long supported bad trade deals that Sanders opposes. That populism that drives the Sanders movement could catch fire in Iowa.

People show up to caucus in Iowa on a cold winter night in 2016. Sanders lovers will trudge through the ice and snow. In Iowa, where retail politics and grass-roots organizing are critical, Clinton finished third in 2008 behind Obama and John Edwards.

In New Hampshire a few days later, Sanders will campaign in a state that borders his own. Sure, Clinton has an enormous money advantage. But that helps more in the bigger states that come later. In Iowa and New Hampshire, candidates have months to meet everybody twice.

Bill Clinton is the only candidate since 1976 to lose both Iowa and New Hampshire and win the nomination. But finishing second to Paul Tsongas in 1992 in the Granite State was good enough for the Comeback Kid.

If Sanders could shock the Hillary Clinton machine in the first two contests of 2016, it may bring other names into the race. Who knows, Joe Biden, John Kerry, Elizabeth Warren? Sanders could do to Hillary what Eugene McCarthy did to LBJ in 1968. The question is who will be the Bobby Kennedy?

James Carville and the late Republican campaign manager Lee Atwater agreed that each party has a populist wing and an elitist wing. For the GOP, the elitist wing is comprised of financial moguls such as Mitt Romney and even Donald Trump. The populist wing is filled by Christian conservatives. That includes Scott Walker, Mike Huckabee and Ben Carson.

Of those, Walker is the only incumbent governor. He is also leading the whole field in Iowa.

For Democrats, the populist wing is led by economic progressives such as Sanders and Warren. The elitist wing is represented nicely by the Hollywood left and Wall Street liberals.

The danger for Hillary Clinton for the Democrats and Jeb Bush for the Republicans is that elite money may not pay off in time. In the meantime, let the grass roots be planted so the long shots can run for daylight in an open field.