

5 Faith Facts About Hillary Clinton's Presidential Contender

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., a self-identified socialist who's perhaps the most left-leaning member of Congress, is expected to announce this week that he will seek the Democratic nomination for president. Sanders, 74, was born to Jewish parents and identifies as Jewish – though culturally, not religiously. Most political observers call him a super long shot for the nomination, but he will appeal to Democratic voters who admire his constant exhortations against the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Sanders has called for free higher education for all Americans, publicly funded elections and a \$1 trillion program to restore the nation's bridges and roads.

Sanders has one grown son, Levi, from his first marriage, and three grown stepchildren from his current marriage to Jane O'Meara Sanders, the former president of Vermont's Burlington College. Raised Catholic, she said in a 1996 interview with the Burlington Free Press that she still practices Catholicism "in my own way."

1. He is the anti-Bible thumper.

Sanders is the presidential contender most willing to dissociate himself from religion. Though he identifies as Jewish and by Jewish law is Jewish, he has freely acknowledged that he is not a religious person. He scored a solid zero from Ralph Reed's Faith and Freedom Coalition in its most recent scorecard and a 100 from the abortion rights group NARAL Pro-Choice America.

2. He grew up in a world of liberal Jewish activism.

Brooklyn-raised Sanders was born to a Polish Jewish immigrant father whose family was mostly wiped out during the Holocaust, and a mother who was the daughter of Polish Jewish immigrants, according to a 2007 New York Times profile. Sanders' version of socialism is rooted in 20th-century Jewish-American leftist politics, which organized for better working conditions and wages, equality for women, and civil rights for African-Americans, among other causes.

3. He spent time in the Holy Land.

After he graduated from the University of Chicago in 1964, Sanders spent several months in Israel on a kibbutz, an agricultural collective and one of the Jewish state's experiments with socialism.

4. He is a fan of Pope Francis.

As far as religious influences go, Sanders said he finds himself "very close to the teachings of Pope Francis," and he described the pope as "incredibly smart and brave," according to USA Today.

5. He'll stand up for Israel.

While he has voiced criticism of the Jewish state and boycotted Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu's recent speech to Congress, Sanders has also stood up to constituents who vilify Israel and defend Hamas, the terrorist group that calls for the destruction of Israel.

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