

# Is There More to the Bernie Sanders-DNC Database Flap?

WASHINGTON, Dec 18 (Reuters) – Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders accused party leaders on Friday of trying to undermine his White House bid and boost rival Hillary Clinton after his campaign was disciplined for accessing Clinton's voter files.

The Democratic National Committee denied the Sanders campaign access to DNC voter data after a Sanders staffer improperly breached Clinton files on Wednesday. Sanders campaign manager Jeff Weaver said the breach was accidental and threatened to go to court Friday afternoon if access to its own data was not restored.

"In this case it looks like they are trying to help the Clinton campaign," Weaver said at a news conference, accusing the DNC of taking the Sanders campaign "hostage."

The Sanders camp fired the staffer who breached Clinton's files and Weaver said he was running a clean campaign.

DNC Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz defended the punishment against Sanders in a CNN interview, saying his campaign had acted in an "inappropriate, unacceptable" manner and had downloaded information.

"To get to the bottom of it we are going to ask the Sanders campaign to participate in an independent audit," she said. "I hope they will agree to that."

The incident comes at an inauspicious time for Sanders, the Democratic socialist who is trying to stop the heavily favored Clinton from running away with the party's 2016 presidential nomination. Sanders has been lagging behind Clinton, with 29 percent support to her 60 percent in recent Reuters/Ipsos

polling.

Sanders, Clinton and a third candidate, former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, are to meet for a debate at St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, on Saturday night.

The breach occurred for a brief period on Wednesday Sanders staffers were able to view confidential information from the DNC, the organization said.

The Sanders campaign said the breach of the files, which contain voter information such as past support and donation history, was an isolated incident and blamed it on the DNC's software vendor, Washington-based NGP VAN, which it said has dropped the firewall between the various Democratic candidates' data more than once.

Stu Trevelyan, chief executive of DNC software vendor NGP VAN, acknowledged the breach in a statement but said his company is not aware of any previous reported incidents of data being "inappropriately available." He called the breach a "brief isolated issue" that was fixed and is now being reviewed.

Liberals sympathetic to Sanders were outraged by the DNC's response to the breach, in line with their concerns that the DNC has made decisions aimed at helping Clinton become the nominee, such as staging fewer debates and holding them on weekends when fewer people will be watching.

"I think the DNC's crossed the line and it's going to open up a whole new part in the campaign season," said RoseAnn DeMoro, executive director of National Nurses United, a liberal group that endorsed Sanders. "I think this is a gloves-off moment."

Another liberal group, Democracy for America, rushed to Sanders' defense.

"The Democratic National Committee's decision to attack the

campaign that figured out the problem, rather than go after the vendor that made the mistake, is profoundly damaging to the party's Democratic process," said Charles Chamberlain, Democracy for America's executive director.

He said DNC leaders "should immediately reverse this disturbing decision before the committee does even more to bring its neutrality in the race for president into question."

A person familiar with the matter told CNN that Josh Uretsky, the Sanders campaign's national data director, was fired for accessing the voter data. {eo}

(Additional reporting by James Oliphant in Washington and and Luciana Lopez and Emily Flitter in New York; writing by Steve Holland, Editing by Bill Trott)