

# Sanders draws huge crowd to Missouri State University

SPRINGFIELD — By the time Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vermont, finished speaking at JQH Arena at Missouri State University, hundreds of people were still waiting to get in.

The 74-year-old senator came to Springfield as a stop on his campaign tour before five states vote on Tuesday in the largest haul of delegates since Super Tuesday. Sanders has been a Cinderella story of sorts, coming from relative anonymity 10 months ago to being a viable contender for the Democratic presidential nominee.

Before the senator's speech, a line wrapped around the perimeter of the arena and snaked around many blocks. Thousands of people made the trip to Springfield — some students, some families from the surrounding area and some from out of state.

Sabrina Pacella, a Sanders supporter and Springfield resident, carried a sign with a picture of the Star Wars character Yoda and text reading, "Bern America's dark side we will."

The sign garnered a lot of attention with the crowd, as Pacella stopped to pose for photos as she made her way around the building to the back of the line.

She said she supports Sanders because she represents some of the demographics he has pledged to support. "He always seemed to be voting for the things that are most important to me," she said.

A volunteer at the event, Steven "Doc" Ensor, said he supported the presidential candidate because he wanted to improve the future for his son.

"My son is 12 years old, and he's never lived in an America that's not at war," he said. "I would rather my son go to college than war."

Inside the arena, people filtered into seats and received signs carrying Sanders' slogan, "A future to believe in." Chants of "Feel the Bern" and a call-and-response of "Bernie Sanders" were heard. Songs with themes of revolution blared on the stereo.

When the event started, the first speaker to endorse Sanders was Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, [who stepped down Feb. 28 from her position as vice chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee](#) to endorse the Vermont senator.

Gabbard, an Iraq War veteran, said Sanders had the "foresight," "good judgment" and "military mindset" to lead the country.

"He has made it clear that he will no longer waste our precious resources on these interventionist, regime-change wars and so-called nation-building, and will instead focus those resources on investing and rebuilding in our nation right here at home," Gabbard said.

Benjamin Jealous, the former NAACP president and chief executive officer also endorsed Sanders. He cited Sanders' past commitment to civil rights issues, [specifically his arrest at a 1963 Civil Rights demonstration in Chicago](#).

When Sanders stepped to the podium, he recited his main platform points including campaign finance reform, raising the minimum wage, closing the income gap, funding free public college education, bolstering the universal healthcare system and instituting more environmental protection measures.

He also made a few off-the-cuff remarks. At one point, the mostly-dark arena was suddenly illuminated. Sanders was no longer in the spotlight, but it seemed just fine.

"Ah, what a beautiful crowd! Nice to see you all," he said to laughs from the audience.

But the senator treated his points with importance. He emphatically gestured with his right hand and raised his index finger in the air. As his speech reached its climax, Sanders challenged the voters of Missouri to turn out to vote.

"The whole country thinks Missouri is a pretty conservative state. But why don't you all surprise them on Tuesday?" he asked. "What a wonderful thing it would be if this state helped lead the country to a political revolution."

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