

Money Can't Buy Time for Sanders

Despite a big edge in spending this year, he won't be able to overcome Clinton's head start.



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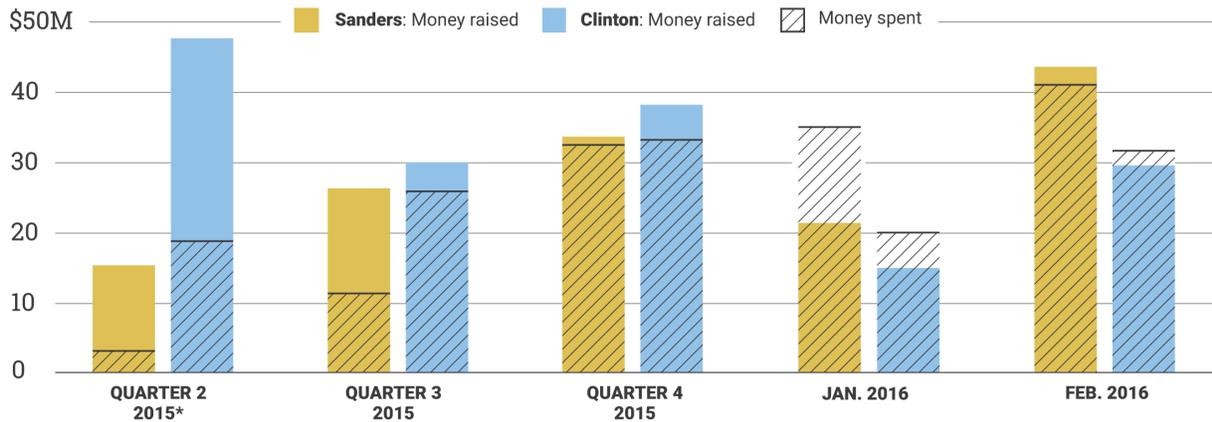
Bernie Sanders's fundraising juggernaut is buying him tens of millions of dollars in TV and Internet ads, charter jets, and pollsters—but it can't buy him the one thing he really needs right now: a time machine.

As the Democratic presidential race heads into the homestretch, the Vermont senator's ability to capture the imagination of the party's small-donor, activist base appears unlikely to overcome the head start that front-runner Hillary Clinton enjoyed in the earliest months of the campaign.

"She announced in April, and she had staff on the ground a week or two after that," said South Carolina Democratic Party Chairman Jaime Harrison, who, like many leading Democrats, believes that Sanders simply cannot come back. "I just don't see that. I think it's a tough hill for him to climb."

Sanders in the first two months of 2016 has outspent Clinton \$76 million to \$52 million, giving him an advantage in advertising and staffing, according to a *National Journal* review of Federal Election Commission filings. Sanders spent \$20.7 million on television ads in February, \$3.8 million more than Clinton. By the end of the month, he had 937 staffers on his payroll, 145 more than Clinton did.

Sanders and Clinton spending and fundraising throughout 2016 election cycle



* Clinton declared candidacy on April 12, 2015; Sanders on May 26.

Sources: Federal Election Commission; Staff reporting

National Journal graphic | Libby Isenstein

Despite this, Clinton was able to take a significant delegate lead in the March 1 Super Tuesday contests—a lead that, because of the Democratic Party’s proportional delegate-allocation rules, can withstand all but a string of overwhelming Sanders victories in the remaining contests.

Clinton’s advantage flows at least in part from the field offices and staff she started bringing online last spring. By Sept. 30, Clinton had spent a total of \$44.5 million, much of it on a campaign machine designed not just for the early primaries, but also for the November general election. She had 511 people on payroll.

In contrast, Sanders by the end of September had spent \$14.4 million. He had 226 staffers drawing a paycheck, less than half of Clinton’s army.

In those early months, Clinton was the hands-down fundraising leader among the entire presidential field, bringing in \$77.4 million by Sept. 30. Sanders was second, with \$41.4 million, yet he chose to bank most of that money. That let him head into October with \$27 million cash on hand, but with little of the infrastructure he would need as the race entered the voting phase. He started hiring large numbers of staff only in the final quarter of 2015.

Clinton’s significant ground-game investment helped her hang onto narrow wins in Iowa and Nevada despite late momentum for Sanders. Her spadework in South Carolina delivered her a crushing win there that helped her to the victories days later in the Super Tuesday states—and those, in turn, gave her a stable lead that in all likelihood will deliver her the nomination.

“She’s going to win. I don’t think he can catch her,” said Tom Henderson, chairman of the Bell County Democrats in Des Moines, Iowa, who credits Sanders for new

of the POLK COUNTY Democrats in Des Moines, Iowa, who credits Sanders for pouring resources into that state and winning a virtual tie.

Whether an earlier start opening field offices and hiring staff would have made enough of a difference, though, is unclear. As Sanders himself noted in his stump speech last summer, he was an obscure senator from a small state running against one of the most well-known people on the planet, who was also extremely popular among Democratic voters.

“That’s a good ‘what-if’ question,” Henderson said, pointing out that the race would likely be very different if Sanders had actually won Iowa. “If you get in late, do you wonder: Did I wait a week too late?”

Sanders did make a concerted effort to break Clinton’s “firewall” in South Carolina. By the end of September, he already had 25 employees in the state, and 126 by the end of 2015. It wasn’t enough. Clinton won the state by 24 points, setting the stage for her Super Tuesday wins three days later.

State party chair Harrison said Sanders worked hard, but it simply wasn’t possible to introduce himself to voters and persuade them to back him over someone they have known and admired for decades. “He was trying to break into communities where they had no idea who he is,” he said. “That’s a big hurdle to jump.”

Graphic by Libby Isenstein



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Representative from Wisconsin
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Mitt Romney
Former Governor of Massachusetts
Former GOP Presidential Nominee

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