

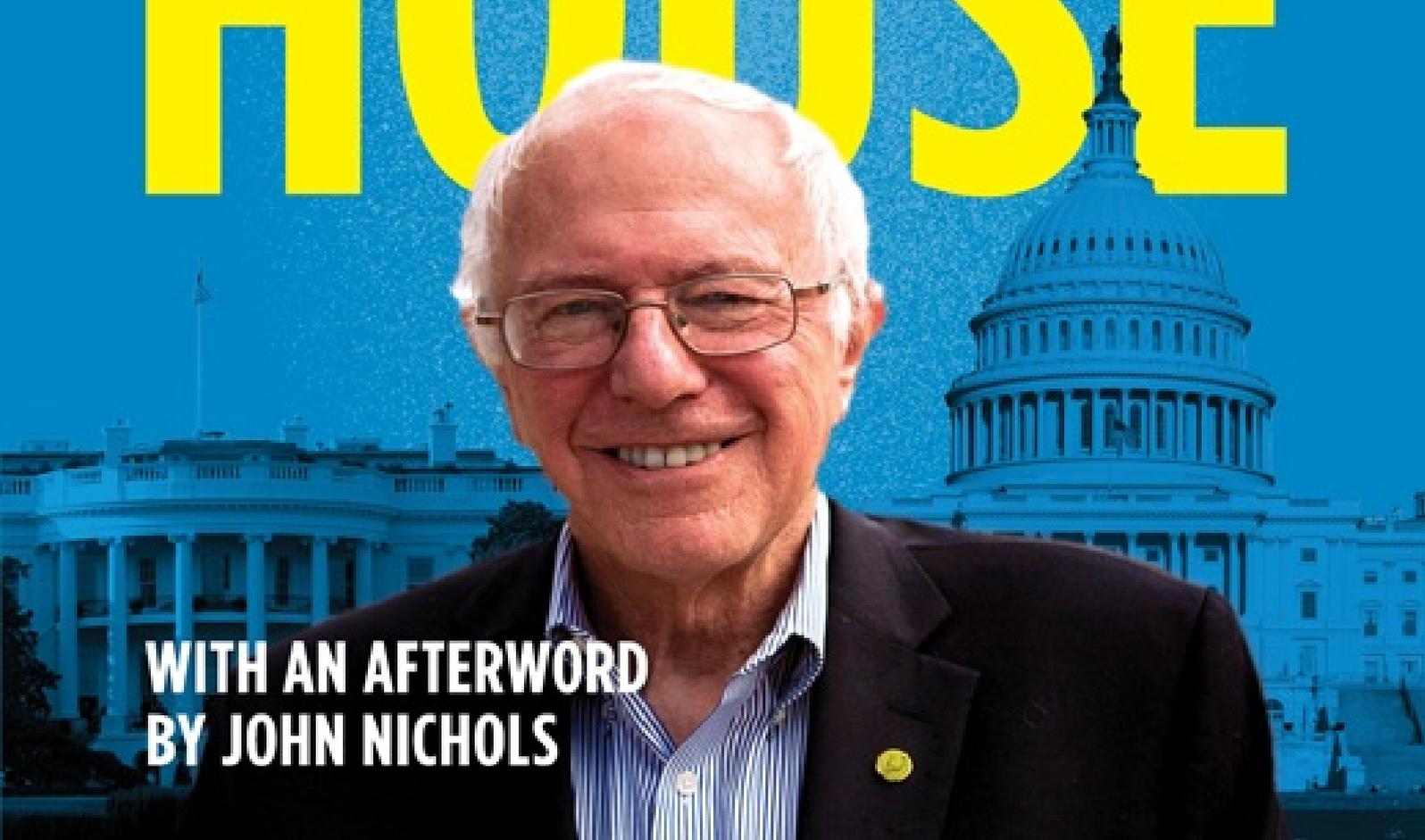
**BERNIE SANDERS**

WITH HUCK GUTMAN

**OUTSIDER**

IN THE **WHITE**

**HOUSE**



WITH AN AFTERWORD  
BY JOHN NICHOLS

# Outsider in the White House

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Bernie Sanders  
with Huck Gutman

Afterword by John Nichols



VERSO

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## Preface

When people say I am too serious, I take it as a compliment. I have always understood politics as a serious endeavor, involving the fates of nations, ideals and human beings who cannot afford to be pawns in a game. I suppose this understanding makes me an outsider in contemporary American politics. But if I am more serious about politics than those candidates who jet from one high-donor fundraiser to the next, or from a Koch Brothers–sponsored summit to the Sheldon Adelson “primary,” I do not think I am more serious than the American people.

The American people want political campaigns to be about candidates’ stands on the issues, not about fundraising, polls, or the negative ads that overwhelm honest debate. Elections should be influenced by grassroots movements and unexpected coalitions, not by the cult of personality or a billionaire’s checkbook.

From the time I began to get involved in politics, as a student organizing for civil rights on the University of Chicago campus, as a peace activist in the Vietnam War era, as a supporter of labor unions and peoples’ struggles, what offended me most about electoral politics was the pettiness. It seemed that the media and political parties were encouraging voters to make decisions of enormous consequence on the basis of whether a candidate had a bright smile or delivered a zinger belittling another candidate—not on the basis of ideas or philosophy, let alone idealism. I never wanted to be a part of such a soulless politics. And across my years of campaigning for causes and for elective office, I think I have done a pretty good job of avoiding it.

The first edition of this book, originally titled *Outsider in the House*, was written two decades ago, after I had been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Vermont but long before I ever imagined I would campaign for the presidency. It tells the story of how we built an independent progressive politics in one city and then in one state. It is the story of an insurgency that won first the mayoralty of Burlington, Vermont’s largest city, and then a statewide congressional seat. More importantly, it is the story of how we used the authority that extended from those victories to make

changes for the better in the lives of people who don't have many allies in positions of power.

The working people of Vermont are the real heroes of this book because they stuck with the fight for economic and social justice long after the media and the political elites expected them to give up. They did not merely keep at it; they drew their friends and neighbors into the process—increasing election turnout at a point when it was declining in much of the rest of the country. I always say that our greatest accomplishment in Burlington was not our initial victory in the mayoral race of 1981—although that was a sweet victory. Our greatest accomplishments were the victories that came in the elections that followed, when increased voter turnout, especially from low-income people and young people, allowed us to beat back the combined efforts of economic and political elites to stop us. We did not overwhelm our opponents with money, we overwhelmed them with votes—like it's supposed to work in a democracy.

When I reread *Outsider in the House* recently, I was reminded of the extent to which this is a story of struggle. It is not the story of easy or steady success. It is the story of hard work, a little progress in the right direction and then a setback, of election defeats and election wins, and of breakthroughs that few of us had imagined possible—until they happened.

A politics of struggle is rooted in values and vision, and above all trust. It involves a compact a candidate makes with the people who share the values, who embrace the vision. It doesn't say, "Vote for me and I'll fix everything." It says, "If I get elected, I will not just work for you, I will work with you." The work may mean implementing a program at the local level or sponsoring legislation at the federal level, but what matters most is the connection that is made between people and their elected representatives—the connection that says there is someone on the inside who is going to fight for the citizens outside the halls of power. When citizens recognize that this fight is being waged, they are energized. They make bigger demands. They build stronger movements. They forge a politics that is about more than winning an election; they forge a politics that is about transforming a city, a state, a nation, and maybe the world.

I embraced this politics of struggle as a young activist on behalf of racial justice. I got involved in electoral politics because I believed that movement activism on behalf of civil rights and women's rights and labor rights and environmental protection and peace needed to be reflected on our ballots and in the corridors of power. I started slow, losing and learning. Eventually, with the help of friends and allies whose loyalty and commitment meant everything to me and everything to our shared success, we started winning. We did not just win elections, we won the transformational progress that only comes when political activism is focused on more than the next election. My decision to run for the presidency in 2016 was inspired by the events outlined in the original text of *Outsider in the House* and by experiences that came after its publication in 1997—in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, and more importantly on picket lines, in marches, and at town hall meetings and rallies against economic inequality, or protesting the impoverishment of workers and communities by failed trade policies, or denouncing the neglect of the basic dignity and humanity of immigrants, or against unnecessary wars, racial injustice and environmental

catastrophe.

The two decades since this book was published have not been easy for Americans. The gap between rich and poor has extended beyond the breaking point of civil society and sound economics. Instead of addressing poverty, politicians of both parties have criminalized it and accepted incarceration rates that are obscene and racist; the devastating effects of climate change have been ignored; we have accepted a warped sense of priorities that says America can always find enough money for war but that there is never enough for infrastructure or education or nutrition programs. Our democracy has been rendered very nearly dysfunctional by Supreme Court rulings that make it easier for billionaires and corporations to buy elections and harder for people of color and students to vote in them. The United States is degenerating into a plutocracy as democracy is overwhelmed by money and negative ads and the collapse of serious journalism.

When I announced I was going to run for president, I said it would take a political revolution for a democratic socialist from Vermont to win the presidency. A lot of pundits thought that was an acknowledgment of impossibility. It wasn't. It was a statement of what would be necessary to undo the damage that has been done and to reclaim our country from the oligarchs. The pundits and the political consultants still have a hard time understanding this. But the people get it. They are turning out by the thousands, by the tens of thousands, for our rallies. They are sending contributions of \$5 or \$10 because they understand that if we all give what we can then we might yet be able to beat the billionaire class.

I am as serious as they say I am. I have no taste for symbolic campaigns. I decided to run for president because I believed it was necessary to do so, because I believed this campaign could bring about a political revolution, and I believed we could win. We did it in Burlington. We did it in Vermont. And we are doing it in America. Change comes, even in the face of overwhelming odds. And the recognition of the changes we have already made, of what we have won, inspires us to fight even harder.

When I began to write the story of my political journey, I accepted the designation "outsider." I have stood outside the mainstream of American politics. I have rejected the status quo. I have cast some lonely votes, fought some lonely fights, mounted some lonely campaigns. But I do not feel lonely now. There are a lot of us outsiders, and we are organizing for a \$15 minimum wage, for job programs that address structural unemployment, for single-payer health care, for free college education, for the renewal of our cities, for the reconstruction of our infrastructure and the creation of millions of jobs, for just and humane reform of a broken and racist criminal justice system, for comprehensive immigration reform and a path to citizenship.

The majority of Americans today are outsiders, especially in the halls of power where decisions about our economy are being made. And we will remain outsiders for as long as the political balance is tipped against the great mass of Americans, for as long as the status quo is characterized by inequality and injustice. It will take all the energy of the new movements of this new time to make the change that is needed. These movements began on the outside, but even now they are beginning to be heard on the inside—changing our politics, changing our laws, changing America. Cities and states are raising wages. They are beginning to address racial disparities in policing

practices and the policies that lead to mass incarceration. They are demanding a constitutional amendment that will overturn Citizens United and restore free and fair elections. Something is happening in America, something that feels like a political revolution. I have been an outsider in the House. I have been an outsider in the Senate. Now I am a candidate for the presidency. I believe that this political revolution might just put an outsider in the White House and that, together, we can remake our politics and our governance so that none of us are outsiders anymore.

I believe we can be serious and optimistic. I believe we can recognize the overwhelming odds against us and forge coalitions that overcome the odds.

The point of beginning is not a political strategy. It is a shared sense of necessity, an understanding that we must act. I believe that Americans, battered by job losses and wage stagnation, angered by inequality and injustice, have come to this understanding. I hear Americans saying loudly and clearly: enough is enough. This great nation and its government belong to all of the people, and not solely to a handful of billionaires, their super PACs, and their lobbyists.

We live in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, but that reality means little because almost all of that wealth is controlled by a tiny handful of individuals. There is something profoundly wrong when the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns almost as much as the bottom 90 percent, and when 99 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent. There is something profoundly wrong when one family owns more wealth than the bottom 130 million Americans. This type of immoral, unsustainable economy is not what America is supposed to be about. This has got to change, and together we will change it.

The change begins when we say to the billionaire class: “You can’t have it all. You can’t get huge tax breaks while children in this country go hungry. You can’t continue sending our jobs to China while millions are looking for work. You can’t hide your profits in the Cayman Islands and other tax havens, while there are massive unmet needs in every corner of this nation. Your greed has got to end. You cannot take advantage of all the benefits of America if you refuse to accept your responsibilities as Americans.”

When we declare, “Enough is enough,” we are demanding a country and a future that meets the needs of the vast majority of Americans: a country and a future where it is hard to buy elections and easy to vote in them; a country and a future where tax dollars are invested in jobs and infrastructure instead of jails and incarceration; a country and a future where we have the best-educated workforce and the widest range of opportunities for every child and every adult; a country and a future where we take the steps necessary to ending systemic racism; a country and a future where we assure once and for all that no one who works forty hours a week will live in poverty.

Now is not the time to think small. We cannot settle for the same old establishment politics and stale inside-the-beltway ideas. We cannot let the billionaire class use its money and its media spin to divide us. Now is the time for millions of working families—black and white, Latino and Native American, gay and straight—to come together, to revitalize American democracy, to end the collapse of the American middle class, and to make certain that our children and grandchildren are able to enjoy a quality of life that brings them health, prosperity, security and joy—and that once

again makes the United States the leader in the world in the fight for economic and social justice, for environmental sanity and for a world of peace.

Now is the time for us to make America the country that the vast majority of our people want it to be. It will take a political revolution to make the change. But I have learned from the experiences recounted in this book that political revolutions are possible. They are not made by billionaires or political insiders. They are made by workers whose jobs are threatened, by students who are overwhelmed by debt, by retirees on fixed incomes, by outsiders who recognize that enough is enough—and who recognize that they must organize and campaign and vote for something better. When we stand together there is nothing, nothing, nothing we cannot accomplish.

*Bernie Sanders*  
*September 2015*

## Introduction

November 5, 1996. We won. Blowout. By 7:30 p.m., only half an hour after the polls close, the Associated Press, based on exit polls, says that we will win, and win big.

The town-by-town election results are coming in by phone and over the radio. In Burlington, my hometown, where we always do well, we are running much stronger than usual. We even win the conservative ward in the new north end. We win Shelburne, a wealthy town usually not supportive. Winooski. Landslide. We win Essex, my opponent's hometown. We're now getting calls in from the southern part of the state. Brattleboro. We're winning there almost three to one. Incredible. We're even winning in Rutland County, traditionally the most Republican county in the state. We're also winning in Bennington County, where I often lose.

By ten o'clock, Jane and I and the kids are down at Mona's restaurant, where we're holding our election night gathering. The crowd is large and boisterous. When our victory celebration appears on the TV monitor, the crowd becomes very loud. I can hardly hear myself speak into the microphones. The noise is deafening. The next day the *Rutland Herald* describes my remarks as "vintage Sanders": "We know that there is something wrong in this country when you have one percent of the population owning more wealth than the bottom ninety percent." I said a few other things as well. I was very happy.

My Republican opponent, Susan Sweetser, calls to concede and we chat for a few minutes. She then goes on television to thank her supporters and wish me well. Jack Long, the Democratic candidate, drops by to offer congratulations.

The extent of our victory becomes clear the next morning when the newspapers publish the town-by-town, county-by-county breakdown of election results: 55 percent of the vote to Sanders, 32 percent to Sweetser, 9 percent to Long. We won in every county in the state and nearly every town. Who could have imagined it? An Independent victory—much less a sweep—is rare. So rare that when *USA Today* published the nationwide tallies for congressional races, the copy under Vermont read:

“At Large—56%, Democrat Jack Long—9%, Republican Susan Sweetser—33%.” Apparently, “Independent” is not a category in the paper’s database.

The newspaper in front of me says that “Sanders is the longest-serving Independent ever elected to Congress, according to Garrison Nelson, a political science professor and an expert on Congressional history.” Gary, who teaches at the University of Vermont, knows about these things. That’s what he studies. Who would have believed it? Thank you, Vermont.

But this had been a tough race, far more difficult than the final election results indicate. Newt Gingrich and the House Republican leadership had “targeted” this election, and spent a huge sum of money trying to defeat me. Some of the most powerful Republicans in the country came to Vermont to campaign for Sweetser, including Majority Leader Dick Armey, Republican national chairman Haley Barbour, presidential candidate Steve Forbes, House Budget chairman John Kasich, and Republican convention keynote speaker Susan Molinari. As chairman of the House Progressive Caucus, a democratic socialist, and a leading opponent of their “Contract with America,” I’ve been a thorn in their side for some time. They wanted me out—badly.

My campaign was also targeted by corporate America. A group of major corporations organized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Federation of Independent Businesses put me at the top of their “hit list” and poured tens of thousands of dollars into the state to sponsor negative and dishonest TV ads, as well as a statewide mailing. By the end of the campaign Vermonters were watching four different TV ads attacking me.

The wealthiest people in Vermont went deep into their pockets for my Republican opponent. They wrote out dozens of \$1,000 checks (the legal maximum) and attended \$500-a-plate functions. We also took on the National Rifle Association (NRA), the National Right to Work Organization, and other right-wing and big money organizations. Never before had the ruling class of Vermont and the nation paid quite so much attention to a congressional race in the small state of Vermont—a state with just one representative.

By contrast, as an Independent, my campaign ran without the support or infrastructure of a major political party. There were no campaign contributions from our “central office” in Washington, no “coordinated campaigns” with other candidates, no photo-ops with a presidential candidate at the local headquarters, no votes from families with a long and proud record of commitment to our party’s ideals. We had to fight for every vote that we got. And that’s what we did.

We rose to the occasion and ran the best campaign that we had for many years—perhaps ever. Our coalition—of unions, women’s organizations, environmental groups, senior citizens, and low-income people—had done a terrific job. We raised close to a million dollars, received over 20,000 individual contributions, distributed by hand over 100,000 pieces of literature, made tens of thousands of phone calls, and sent out over 130,000 pieces of mail. The campaign staff was fantastic, our volunteers dedicated—and it all came together on Election Day.

Obviously, this book is more than a manual on running a successful congressional campaign. It is a political biography. It talks about some of the victories that I and my

co-workers in Vermont have had, but also about a lot of *unsuccessful* campaigns and derailed ventures. (Given the state of the left in America, how could it be otherwise?)

This is a book about hopes and dreams that will not be realized in our lifetimes. It is about the fragility of democracy in America, a nation in which the majority of people do not know the name of their congressional representative and over half the people no longer vote. It is about a political system in which a tiny elite dominates both parties—and much of what goes on in Washington—through financial largesse.

Here is a story of corporate greed and contempt for working people, of private agendas masquerading as the public good and corporate America's betrayal of workers in its drive for galactic profits. It describes a national media, owned by large corporations, which increasingly regards news as entertainment, insults the intelligence of American citizens daily, and is even further removed from the reality of everyday life than the average politician.

And Vermont. This is a book about the great state of Vermont—my favorite place in the world—and about our “big city,” Burlington, with 40,000 people. It visits our small towns, where most Vermonters live, and drops by our county fairs and our parades to look at the kind of special relationship that exists between people in this small state.

It is about my eight years as mayor of Burlington, and how the progressive movement there helped make that city one of the most exciting, democratic, and politically conscious cities in America. Yes! Democracy can work. It is about the United States Congress, the good members and the not so good. It examines the two major political parties—neither of which comes close to representing the needs of working people—and the frustrations and successes of helping to create an independent progressive political movement. It reviews some of the battles in which I've participated—for sane priorities in our federal budget, for a national health care system guaranteeing health care for all, for a trade policy that represents the needs of working people rather than multinational corporations, for an end to corporate welfare, and for the protection of programs that sustain the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

Most of all, this book is about the struggle to maintain a vision of economic and social justice, and the optimism necessary to keep that vision alive.

It goes without saying that I never would have become mayor of Burlington, Vermont, or a U.S. congressman without the help of dozens of close friends and co-workers who have worked at my side for many, many years. They have energized me and sustained me. Thanks to all of them.

## You Have to Begin Somewhere

May 20, 1996. I'm tired. It was too hot last night and I didn't sleep well. All night a raccoon chattered in the attic of the house, finally waking me up for good at 6:30 a.m., after only four hours' sleep. All night I worried about the impact of Dick Arme's visit to the state of Vermont.

Arme, Newt Gingrich's number-two man and the type of reactionary who makes even Gingrich look like a liberal, came to Vermont to endorse Susan Sweetser, my opponent in the upcoming congressional election. More importantly, he came to raise money for her. Sweetser probably made a big mistake by inviting him, since Arme, the majority leader in the House, epitomizes the congressional right wing that is every day sinking lower in the public's estimation. About thirty Vermonters demonstrated at the hotel where Arme was speaking at a \$500-a-plate dinner. They are not great fans of the Gingrich-Arme "Contract with America."

The article in the *Burlington Free Press*, the largest paper in the state, gave decent coverage to the demonstrators' protest against the savagery of the Republican cuts in Congress. The press coverage raised important issues about the Republican agenda, with its attacks on the poor, the elderly, and women, and in doing so tied Sweetser to that unpopular agenda. It even quoted someone from the local chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW), a definite plus. Still, Sweetser ended up raising \$30,000 in one night, which is a helluva lot of money, especially in a small state like Vermont.

Sweetser had advertised the Arme event as a "private briefing by the Majority Leader." I wondered if Arme was going to share his wisdom with rich Vermont Republicans about how we should eliminate Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the concept of the minimum wage, ideas he had voiced in the past. Or maybe he was just going to talk about the "Republican Revolution." In any case, in Vermont \$500 is a lot of money for dinner. I hope these rich folks enjoyed themselves.

I feel in my gut that this is going to be a very, very tough campaign. I won the last election by only three points, and Sweetser is much better organized than my previous opponent. She has started her campaign much earlier and is going to raise a lot more money than he did. I also fear that it will be a nasty campaign, with personal attacks

that will become increasingly ugly. It's going to be a brutal six months, and frankly I'm not looking forward to it.

What is really distressing is not only the negative campaigning—the lies and distortions that have already begun—but the enormous amount of time I am going to have to spend raising money and dealing with campaign operations, rather than doing the work I was elected to do in Congress. Sweetser began her campaign in *November*—less than halfway into my two-year term. That's crazy. That means that I have to keep my mind on an election for twelve months, rather than focusing on my real work.

The last couple of weeks I played a leading role in opposing the Republican Defense Authorization Bill, which supplied \$13 billion *more* for defense than Clinton's budget had allocated. And Clinton's budget was already way too high. But now, instead of concentrating on the important issues facing Vermont and America, I will have to devote more and more energy to the campaign. I am going to have to start getting on the phone and raising money. I'm going to have to think about polling, and TV ads, and a campaign staff. I'm going to have to make sure that we don't repeat the many mistakes that we made in the last campaign. Basically, I'm going to have to be more *political*. It's too early for that, and I don't like it.

Most people don't realize how far Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, and their friends have shifted the debate about where the country should be moving. In terms of the defense budget, 75 House Democrats—out of 197—supported the outrageous boost in military expenditures. Of course, almost all of the Republicans (including those fierce “deficit hawks”) backed the increase. The Cold War is over, we spend many times more than all of our “enemies” combined and, with very little fanfare, the defense budget is significantly raised.

In the Armed Forces Committee, the vote for increased military spending was almost unanimous. Only two members, Ron Dellums and Lane Evans, out of the fifty-five members of the committee, voted against it. That's pathetic. A little pork for my district, a little pork for yours—and taxpayers end up spending tens of billions more than is needed.

Ditto for the intelligence budget. Major Owens of New York, Barney Frank of Massachusetts, and I have been trying to cut the CIA and other intelligence agency budgets for the last five years. This year, while introducing an amendment to trim their budget by 10 percent, I read into the record a *New York Times* article that described how the National Reconnaissance Office, one of the larger intelligence agencies, had *lost* \$4 billion. That's right. They lost the money. They simply could not account for \$4 billion, and their financial records were a complete shambles. No problem. The intelligence agencies got their increase anyhow.

Meanwhile, the Republican Congress, with many Democrats in agreement, are cutting back on every social program that people need—for the elderly, for children, for the sick and disabled, for the homeless, for the poor. That's called “getting our priorities straight.”

I always feel anxious at the beginning of a campaign, but I feel more so this time. It's bad enough to be on the hit list of Gingrich and Arney, and to have the chairman of the Republican National Committee come to Vermont to announce he will give Sweetser the maximum allowable under the law, \$153,000. What is most worrying,

however, is that we progressives are not generating the excitement and support we need. That's the situation even in Vermont, where independent progressive politics is as advanced as any place in the country.

I have no illusions. This is my fifth race for Congress. I lost in 1988, won in 1990, '92, '94. People are not as excited as they were when I first ran. "Reelect Bernie—Again" is not an especially stirring slogan. And there simply aren't enough progressives committed to *making* the electoral struggle. The activities of most progressives revolve around specific issues and action groups. Many are not really in touch with their communities, nor do they appreciate the hard work involved in winning a congressional seat, a governorship, or even a mayoralty. Theory and ideas are exciting, but the practical work of capturing and holding public office—that's another story. So I'm concerned about running into the same problem we saw two years ago: lack of motivation among our core supporters.

One difficulty we're up against is that, to a large degree, modern American politics is about image and technique. In case you haven't noticed, elections do not have much to do with the burning issues facing our society. Ideas. Vision. Analysis. Give me a break! Most campaigns are about thirty-second TV ads, getting out the vote, polling, and reaching undecided voters.

It is six months before the election, and the Republicans have already done their focus groups. How do I know? I can hear it in their "message," which they repeat over and over again like a mantra: "Bernie Sanders is ineffective. Bernie Sanders is out of touch. Bernie Sanders is a left-wing extremist. Bernie Sanders rants and raves on the House floor and still no one listens to him. Susan Sweetser, on the other hand, is a sensible moderate who can work with everyone." They think that's how they can beat me. Maybe.

It is very frustrating that, because modern electoral politics is driven by technique, one needs more and more sophisticated "experts" in order to compete in the big league of congressional campaigns. But how far does one go in this direction? Was I elected to Congress as the first Independent in forty years so that I could hire a slick Washington insider consultant who will tell me what to say and do? Not very likely. Am I going to be shaped and molded by a Washington insider? Not while I have a breath in my body.

On the other hand, is it against some law of nature for a progressive and democratic socialist to present effective television ads, or is that just something that Republicans and Democrats are allowed to do? No. In my view we should do our TV well. Shouldn't we be prepared to respond immediately to TV ads from my opponent which distort my record? Yes. Are we betraying the cause of socialism because we don't communicate with mimeographed leaflets and pictures of Depression-era workers in overalls and caps? No. The world has changed, and it's appropriate to use the tools that are available.

Still, I have reservations. From my first day in Vermont politics, I prided myself on never once having gone to an outside consultant. We did everything within the state of Vermont, everything "in-house," usually in *my* house. You should have seen how we wrote the radio ads—around my kitchen table. John Franco, a former Assistant City Attorney in Burlington, loud, brilliant, occasionally vulgar. George Thabault—my

assistant when I was mayor, imaginative, funny. David Clavelle, a local printer who had also worked in my administration. Huck Gutman and Richard Sugarman—college professors. Jane and me. Quite a crew. A helluva way to write a radio ad.

As for our television ads, we always went with my close friends and wonderful Burlington filmmakers, Jimmy Taylor and Barbara Potter. They were always good, sometimes brilliant, and they knew Vermont. My wife, Jane, who is the most visual person that I know, was also in the middle of things. In 1990, when I won my first congressional race, Jimmy, Barbara, and Jane produced an ad that received rave reviews. It was taped in Jimmy and Barbara's living room in Burlington. For two hours, with the camera pointed straight at my face, Barbara and I chatted informally about why I was involved in politics and what issues were of greatest concern to me. Jimmy and Barbara then edited the content down, and we aired a five-minute spot.

At a time when the vast majority of TV commercials were thirty seconds or less, this ad was not only well received for its straightforward focus on the issues, but for the novelty of its length. Later, we cut the ad into one-minute and thirty-second sections, reinforcing what the voters had already learned from the original.

In 1990, local talent was enough. It helped us win an election that most people thought we would lose. And it was more than effective in 1992 and '94. But now, in 1996, we are taking on the Republican National Committee, probably the most sophisticated political organization in the world, with money to burn. I know that we are not as prepared for the Republican assault as we should be, that we are facing the fight of our lives and we need all the help we can get.

So, for the first time, I went out of state to a real, grown-up "consultant." I figured that we really didn't have to do what they said, but that it wouldn't hurt to listen. But more on that later.

Plainfield, Vermont, fall 1971. I had just moved from Stannard, a tiny town in that remote section of Vermont we call the Northeast Kingdom, and was living in Burlington, which, with less than 40,000 inhabitants, is the state's largest city. I had originally come to Vermont in 1964 for the summer, and permanently settled there in 1968. Jim Rader, a friend from my student days at the University of Chicago, whose acquaintance I renewed in Vermont, mentioned to me that the Liberty Union Party was holding a meeting at Goddard College in Plainfield. I'd heard of the Liberty Union, a small peace-oriented third party that had run candidates in Vermont's previous election. Jim's information rattled around in my brain for a few days, and I ended up going to the Plainfield meeting.

Why did I go? I really don't know. I had been active in radical politics at the University of Chicago, where I was involved in the civil rights and peace movements, and had worked very briefly for a labor union. I grew up in a lower-middle-class home in Brooklyn, New York, and knew what it was like to be in a family where lack of money was a constant source of tension and unhappiness.

My father worked hard as a paint salesman—day after day, year after year. There was always enough money to put food on the table and to buy a few extras, but never enough to fulfill my mother's dream of moving out of our three-and-a-half-room apartment and into a home of our own. Almost every major household purchase—a

bed, a couch, drapes—would be accompanied by a fight between my parents over whether or not we could afford it. On one occasion I made the mistake of buying the groceries that my mother wanted at a small, local store rather than at the supermarket where the prices were lower. I received, to say the least, a rather emotional lecture about wise shopping and not wasting money.

I was a good athlete, and there was always enough money for a baseball glove, sneakers, track shoes, and a football helmet—but usually not quite of the quality that some of the other kids had. While I had my share of hand-me-downs, there was enough money for decent clothes, but only after an enormous amount of shopping around to get the “best buy.” At a very young age I learned that lack of money and economic insecurity can play a pivotal role in determining how one lives life. That’s a lesson I’ve never forgotten.

When I was graduating James Madison High School in Brooklyn, New York, I applied for admission into college. My father had his doubts. He had dropped out of high school in Poland and come to this country as a young man, worked hard all of his life and, with vivid memories of the Depression, wondered whether a solid job after high school wasn’t a safer route than spending four more years as a student. My mother, who had graduated high school in the Bronx, disagreed and thought it important that I go to college.

My parents always voted Democratic, as did virtually every other family in our Jewish neighborhood, but they were basically nonpolitical. My family went to only one political meeting that I can recall, when Adlai Stevenson spoke at my elementary school, P.S. 197, during one of his presidential campaigns. It was my brother, Larry, who introduced me to political ideas. He became chairman of the Young Democrats at Brooklyn College and, fulfilling his sibling duties, dragged me to some of his meetings. More importantly, he was a voracious reader and brought all kinds of books and newspapers into the house, which he discussed with me.

I spent one year at Brooklyn College and four years at the University of Chicago, from which I graduated with a BA in 1964. I got through college with student loans and grants and through part-time work. I was not a good student. I took some time off from my studies when a dean suggested that perhaps I should “evaluate” my commitment to higher education. The truth is, though, that I learned a lot more from my out-of-class activities than I did through my formal studies. At the university I became a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Peace Union (SPU), and the Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL). I participated in civil rights activities related to ending segregation in Chicago’s school system and in housing, and I marched against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. I also worked, very briefly, for a trade union, the United Packinghouse Workers. At the end of my junior year I worked in a mental hospital in California as part of a project for the American Friends Service Committee.

While coursework didn’t interest me all that much, I read everything I could get my hands on—except what I was required to read for class. The University of Chicago has one of the great libraries in America, and I spent a lot of time burrowed deep in the “stacks”—the basement area where most of the books were stored. I read mostly about American and European history, philosophy, socialism, and psychology. Among many