

Obama joins effort to push Democratic primary campaign to the right

By Patrick Martin
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Former President Barack Obama made his first public intervention into the campaign for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, telling an audience of large financial donors in Washington Friday that he was opposed to “revolutionary” proposals and “crazy stuff” being put forward on “left-leaning Twitter feeds.”

While he named no candidates, his remarks were clearly intended—and so interpreted by the press—to undermine the campaigns of Senator Bernie Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren, generally identified as the “left” wing of the Democratic field, and to promote former Vice President Joe Biden and other “moderate” candidates, including South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Senator Kamala Harris and Senator Amy Klobuchar.

Obama delivered an hour-long speech to the Democracy Alliance, which met last week in Washington to discuss plans to distribute campaign contributions in the 2020 elections. He appeared on the same platform as Stacey Abrams, the defeated Democratic candidate last year for governor of Georgia, who has been widely promoted as a possible vice-presidential candidate for whoever wins the Democratic nomination in 2020.

The former president presented his critique as a declaration of where “voters” are, but his denunciation of supposedly left-wing proposals clearly expressed the views of the military-intelligence apparatus, Wall Street and the Democratic Party establishment as a whole.

“This is still a country that is less revolutionary than it is interested in improvement,” Obama claimed. “They like seeing things improved. But the average American doesn’t think we have to completely tear down the system and remake it.”

He added, “They just don’t want to see crazy stuff.”

He sided with those candidates, like Biden and Buttigieg, who claim to want to build on the “progress” of the Affordable Care Act rather than proposing an entirely new health care program under the label “Medicare for All.”

He continued, “We also have to be rooted in reality and the fact that voters, including the Democratic voters and certainly persuadable independents or even moderate Republicans are not driven by the same views that are reflected on certain, you know, left-leaning Twitter feeds. Or the activist wing of our party.”

Obama’s remarks were immediately hailed by publications that have been waging war against the so-called “swing to the left” in the Democratic presidential nomination campaign. The *New York Times* wrote, in its “news” report: “The comments marked an extraordinary entrance into the primary contest by the former president, who has been careful to avoid even the appearance of influencing the direction of the race. His remarks offered an implicit critique of Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren ...”

The intervention of the former president comes after two other events that signal an effort by Wall Street interests to push back against the billionaire-bashing rhetoric of Sanders and Warren. Last week, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, one of the 10 richest men in America, with a fortune of \$53 billion, filed to enter the Democratic presidential contest in the state of Alabama. He has been vocal in his opposition to both Sanders and Warren, and initially decided not to enter the race for the nomination last March, after Biden did so.

While this was presented as “preserving his options” because of a state deadline, rather than a final decision to enter the race, Bloomberg began Friday what his

spokesman called a \$100 million digital ad campaign attacking President Trump in battleground states like Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Arizona. This is presumably just a down payment on the vast resources Bloomberg would deploy in the event of a full-fledged candidacy. The \$100 million, doled out by the media and financial services mogul like petty cash, is more than the top fundraiser among the declared candidates, Sanders, has collected in the course of nearly a year.

On November 12, former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick announced his candidacy and filed for the primary ballot in neighboring New Hampshire, one of the first two contests in the race. Patrick is a close ally of Obama and served in the Clinton administration's Department of Justice before becoming the first African-American governor of Massachusetts, from 2007 to 2015. After leaving office, he took a position with Bain Capital, the hedge fund once run by Mitt Romney.

He is clearly seeking to attract Wall Street support for his campaign and offer himself as a replacement for the faltering Joe Biden. In remarks made during his first day as a candidate, he distinguished his approach from Warren's, telling the press, "I don't think that wealth is the problem—I think greed is the problem." He added that "taxes should go up on the most prosperous and the most fortunate," but "not as a penalty."

There were other indications of the impact of this concerted effort to push the Democratic presidential contest further to the right. In Iowa, according to the CNN/ *Des Moines Register* poll issued Sunday and given massive media publicity, South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg has now jumped into the lead, with 25 percent support among "likely caucus-goers," compared to 16 percent for Warren and 15 percent each for Sanders and Biden. The poll also promoted the interests of Senator Amy Klobuchar, another competitor to Biden as the possible "moderate" favorite, who stood at 6 percent, in fifth place.

Buttigieg's campaign has been heavily promoted by the media and the Democratic Party establishment as a fallback operation in the event the Biden campaign continues its decline. Corporate interests have propelled Buttigieg into the top ranks of campaign fundraising, as he collected more than \$19 million in the third quarter, trailing only Sanders and Warren.

His campaign began a \$2 million advertising campaign in Iowa Thursday, with his first ads highlighting his role as a military intelligence officer in Afghanistan.

The *New York Times* gushed—again, in its "news" coverage—that the poll results "are the latest evidence of Mr. Buttigieg's strength in Iowa, where his moderate political views, plain-spoken style and military history have resonated in the early voting state."

The response of Elizabeth Warren to this barrage of criticism from billionaires, rival candidates and the media has been to pull in her horns on the "Medicare for All" proposal that she and Sanders have been championing. After releasing a detailed cost analysis last month claiming that she would spend \$20.5 trillion to provide universal access to health care, Warren released a Plan B on Friday, dubbed a "transition plan," which effectively put off any significant change in health care financing until the third year of a four-year presidential term—in other words, forever.

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