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"THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED"

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In Alabama, Sanders makes appeal to Deep South black voters

By Kim Chandler
MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders made an appeal May 20 to black voters in the Deep South, stopping at a historically African American church and calling health care a "human right" that he equated to the civil rights movement. Speaking before a racially diverse crowd at Mt. Zion Church AME Church in Alabama's capital, Sanders renewed his calls for extending health care coverage to all Americans and reducing student debt. "Just as civil rights is a human right, health care is a human right," Sanders said to loud applause. The crowd for his midday speech was about half white despite the church's deep ties to the civil rights movement. Wrapping up a four-state Southern swing that included stops in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, the Vermont senator is working to strengthen his support among black voters who comprise most of the Democratic primary electorate in many Southern states. Earlier in the day, Sanders toured nearby civil rights sites and visited an impoverished area of the state where residents struggle with adequate wastewater sanitation. On Sunday, he held a rally in a park in downtown Birmingham.

Sanders said full-time workers should not "live in poverty" in the wealthiest nation in the world and noted that Alabama is one of the states with no minimum wage above the federal minimum. He said the minimum wage should be raised to \$15.

Sanders also touted his recently unveiled K-12 education plan, saying education should become a national priority.

"As a people, as Americans, we have got to say loudly and proudly that education is a major priority in this country," Sanders said.

In Montgomery, Sanders was greeted by a large and enthusiastic crowd that chanted "Bernie!" with several people interrupting his speech to shout, "We love you!"

Sanders has previously talked up his days as a civil rights activist while a student at the University of Chicago. He has also visited Selma, Alabama, participating in ceremonies marking the anniversary of Bloody Sunday at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the site of one of the most galvanizing moments in support of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Jeanise Murry, a 49-year-old African American nurse who heard Sanders speak Monday, said she likes some of the things he mentioned but is still deciding which candidate to support in 2020.

"It won't be (President Donald) Trump," Murry said.

North Carolina university to address racism allegations

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (AP) - A North Carolina university says it is forming a commission to address allegations of racism.

The Winston-Salem Journal reports Wake Forest University President Nathan Hatch announced in a letter posted this week the formation of the President's Commission on Race, Equity and Community. The commission will include students, faculty, staff and community members. The first meeting is scheduled for September.

Jose Villalba, vice president of diversity and inclusion and chief diversity officer for Wake Forest, says people have already contacted the university requesting to be involved.

The school was in the spotlight after images from old yearbooks showed students posing with Confederate flags or in blackface. A racist Instagram post in March suggested Wake Forest build a wall to separate it from Winston-Salem State University, the city's historically black university.



Robert F. Smith, left, laughs with David Thomas, center, and actress Angela Bassett at Morehouse College on Sunday, May 19, 2019, in Atlanta. Smith, a billionaire technology investor and philanthropist, said he will provide grants to wipe out the student debt of the entire graduating class at Morehouse College - an estimated \$40 million. Smith, this year's commencement speaker, made the announcement Sunday morning while addressing nearly 400 graduating seniors of the all-male historically black college in Atlanta. (Bo Emerson/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP)

Speaker stuns 2019 Morehouse grads, to pay off student debt

By Errin Haines Whack
A billionaire technology investor stunned the entire graduating class at Morehouse College when he announced at their commencement Sunday that he would pay off their student loans -- estimated at up to \$40 million.

Robert F. Smith, this year's commencement speaker, made the announcement while addressing nearly 400 graduating seniors of the all-male historically black college in Atlanta. Smith, who is black, is the Founder and CEO of Vista Equity Partners, a private equity firm that invests in software, data, and technology-driven companies.

"On behalf of the eight generations of my family that have been in this country, we're gonna put a little fuel in your bus," the investor and philanthropist told graduates in his morning address. "This is my class, 2019. And my family is making a grant to eliminate their student loans."

The announcement immediately drew stunned looks from faculty and students alike. Then the graduates broke into the biggest cheers of the morning and stood up, applauding. Morehouse said it is the single largest gift to the college.

Though college officials could not provide an estimate of the exact amount owed by the current graduating class, students graduate with an average debt of \$30,000 to \$40,000, said Terrance L. Dixon, vice president of enrollment management.

Smith, who received an honorary doctorate from Morehouse during the ceremony, had already announced a \$1.5 million gift to the school.

Smith said he expected the recipients to "pay it forward" and said he hoped that "every class has the same opportunity going forward."

"Because we are enough to take care of our own community," Smith said. "We are enough to ensure that we have all the opportunities of the American dream. And we will show it to each other through our actions and through our words and through our deeds."

In the weeks before graduating from Morehouse on Sunday, 22-year-old finance major Aaron Mitchom drew up a spreadsheet to calculate how long it would take him to pay back his \$200,000 in student loans - 25 years at half his monthly salary, per his calculations.

In an instant, that number vanished. Mitchom, sitting in the crowd, wept. "I can delete that spreadsheet," he said in an interview after the commencement. "I don't have to live off of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I was shocked. My heart dropped. We all cried. In the moment it was like a burden had been taken off."

His mother, Tina Mitchom, was also shocked. Eight family members, including Mitchom's 76-year-old grandmother, took turns over four years co-signing on the loans that got him across the finish line.

"It takes a village," she said. "It now means he can start paying it forward and start closing this gap a lot sooner, giving back to the college and thinking about a succession plan" for his younger siblings.

Morehouse College president David A. Thomas said the gift would have a profound effect on the students' futures.

"Many of my students are interested in going into teaching, for example, but leave with an amount of student debt that makes that untenable," Thomas said in an interview. "In some ways, it was a liberation gift for these young men that just opened up their choices."

Whack reported from Philadelphia. Associated Press writer Ben Nadler contributed to the report from Atlanta.

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