News



Democratic presidential candidate and former Vice President Joe Biden, left, gestures while seated next to U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., prior to speaking at New Hope Baptist Church, Sunday, March 8, 2020, in Jackson, Miss. Seated right, is Thompson's daughter, B.J. Thompson. (AP/Rogelio V. Solis)

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Jackson, Miss. — March 9, 2020
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Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden worshiped at a predominantly African American church in Mississippi two days before the state's primary, in which black voters will play a pivotal role.

Rival Bernie Sanders was campaigning March 8 roughly 900 miles (1,450 kilometers) to the north in Michigan, the biggest prize among the six states voting March 10. The Vermont senator was looking to bolster his own appeal with African Americans by announcing the endorsement of civil rights icon the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Biden was welcomed by applause at New Hope Baptist Church, where he was accompanied by the NAACP national president, Derrick Johnson, and by U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, both of whom are from Mississippi. They sat in the front row, and Biden sang along with the congregation: "Oh, victory in Jesus, my savior forever."

Thompson endorsed the former vice president on March 5 and introduced him to the congregation. "We know what it means to be picked out, to be picked on," Thompson said. "We know Joe. I'm going to give him another name."

He called Biden "the comeback kid."

Biden had struggled in the early voting states of Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada, where Sanders emerged as the front-runner, but won decisively in South Carolina on Feb. 29, boosted by African American voters. He also had a strong showing on Super Tuesday in states with large numbers of black voters.

"If I am the comeback kid, which I ain't there yet, but if I'm the comeback kid, there's only one reason I've come back — the African American community all around the country," Biden said to applause by the congregation.

Biden mentioned former President Barack Obama several times. He said the United States is at "an inflection point" because of poor treatment in the past three years of people who are marginalized, isolated and oppressed.

Obama's name also came up at a Sanders rally March 8 in the West Michigan city of Grand Rapids — but under very circumstances. The senator and Jackson appeared together before thousands of cheering supporters at a downtown plaza and Sanders said Jackson "has broken down more barriers than others can even dream of" while blazing a path against racism that helped propel Obama to the White House.

"If there was no Jesse Jackson, in my view, there never would have been a President Barack Obama," Sanders said.

"Let me just say to Rev. Jackson: It's one of the honors of my life to be supported by a man who has put his life on the line for the last 50 years fighting for justice," he added.

Jackson and Obama's relationship has not been without its past issues, including in 2008, when Jackson apologized for saying Obama had been "talking down to black people."

Addressing the Michigan rally, Jackson stayed focused on Sanders, saying, "I stand with Bernie Sanders today because he stood with me," and adding that the senator "never lost taste for justice for people."

Sanders upset Hillary Clinton during Michigan's Democratic primary in 2016 and noted that Jackson won the state during his own bid in the 1988 presidential primary.



Alannah Garrett, 19, of Saginaw, poses for a photo at a rally for Bernie Sanders at Calder Plaza in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Sunday, March 8, 2020. Garrett said she is voting for Sanders for environmental reasons as well as for social justice issues. (AP/The Grand Rapids Press/Anntaninna Biondo)

"Tuesday, there is going to be a very, very important primary here in Michigan," Sanders said. "Back in 1988, Jesse Jackson won the state. In 2016, I won the state. And, on Tuesday, if we stick together, we bring our friends out to vote, we're gonna

win it again."

Back in Mississippi, Biden talked about the 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. "I underestimated that hate's never defeated. It only hides," Biden said.

Daisy Carter, 75, attended the church service where Biden spoke, and said afterward that she is enthusiastically supporting him and will ask others to vote for him, too.

"He was Obama's right hand, and Obama was our man," said Carter, who is African American and is retired as a Head Start purchasing agent. She said it is important to defeat President Donald Trump, and she thinks Biden can do that.

Speaking of Biden, she said: "I feel at home with him."

Actress Vivica A. Fox and former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick spoke to a racially diverse crowd March 8 at a get-out-the-vote rally for Biden at historically black Tougaloo College in Jackson. "Joe had President Obama's back for every minute of those eight years in office," said Fox, who also campaigned for Biden in South Carolina before that state's primary.

As Jackson was endorsing Sanders, meanwhile, Biden picked up the coveted endorsement of California Sen. Kamala Harris, who said she would "do everything in my power'' to help elect the former vice president. She is the latest dropout from the Democratic race for president to line up behind Biden in his matchup against Sanders.

On March 9, former presidential candidate Sen. Cory Booker also endorsed Biden, further solidifying the Democratic establishment's move to close circles around Biden after his Super Tuesday success.

Despite that, Jackson said he chose Sanders after the campaign offered responses on 13 issues Jackson raised, including protecting voting rights, increasing funding for historically black colleges and universities and committing to putting African Americans on the Supreme Court, according to a statement released by the Sanders' campaign. He also said Biden's campaign hadn't approached him about an endorsement but Sanders' did.

Speaking at the rally, Jackson brushed aside some voters' uneasiness about Sanders' avowed democratic socialist ideology, saying Sanders will defend democratic values

and that issues important to poor and minority people wouldn't have been prioritized in the presidential race without him.

"Thank God for Bernie Sanders," Jackson said.

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