

## Iowa Democrats, experts: It's Clinton's race to lose

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Hillary Clinton takes the stage as she is introduced during a Democratic presidential candidate debate at Drake University. (Jack Gruber-USA TODAY)

DES MOINES — The race for the Democratic nomination for president is right where it started: It's Hillary Clinton's race to lose.

That was the feeling among many Democrats and political experts who were on the Drake University campus Saturday for the second Democratic presidential debate.

"I think it's Hillary's to lose," said Ben Verhasselt, a senior at Drake studying politics and Spanish and a self-described undecided Democratic voter who is leaning toward supporting Bernie Sanders. "I've seen Hillary speak, and she's still Hillary. She's still very captivating and very experienced."

Clinton, the former first lady, U.S. senator and secretary of state, has established a commanding lead in most polls on the Democratic race after a summer surge for Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont narrowed what started as an enormous gap. Clinton's lead over Sanders in recent Iowa polls ranges from the high teens to the 30s.

"The simple reality of the polling suggests that Sanders has never really managed to crack around a quarter of the vote in terms of general support among Democrats, and that's just not a strong position to be in this close to the (Feb. 1) caucuses," said David Redlawsk, a political science professor and fellow at Drake University's Harkin Institute for Public Policy and Citizen Engagement.

But there were real concerns about her candidacy, said Drake political science professor Dennis Goldford.

"She is a flawed candidate, if not a damaged candidate," he said. "And I think between the hearings where she testified (about the 2012 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Libya) and the (first) debate, she sort of found herself there at least for a little bit, stabilized her support."

Clinton has stable support from Cindy Garlock of Cedar Rapids, who attended Saturday's debate. Garlock said she supports Clinton because she is

a “champion” for women and children, and because of her foreign policy experience, which Garlock said is especially important after the terrorist attacks Friday that killed more than 120 people in Paris.

“(Clinton) is so smart about international affairs, and I think that right now with the situation (in Paris) the way it is, that is something that is critical,” Garlock said.

“We can’t have a president that’s going to take time to get up to speed on international affairs. She knows it all. She knows exactly who the players are and how to get them to the table. She’s ready on Day 1, so that’s probably right now the biggest reason we should all be supporting her.”

Wendy Smith of Jesup remains undecided. Smith, who attended the debate with her husband, said she hoped to hear more specific policy ideas from the candidates, not just “the big buzzwords.”

Her husband, Jeff, is in Sanders’ camp, largely because of campaign finance reform, an issue Sanders has championed.

“Without (campaign finance reform), nothing else matters,” Jeff Smith said.

Verhasselt said he is leaning toward Sanders, but is keeping an open mind and had good things to say about all three Democratic candidates, including O’Malley, who has remained mired in the low single digits in polling on the race.

“Bernie has rallied a lot of youth votes, and is kind of running an entirely unprecedented, different campaign,” Verhasselt said. “(O’Malley) doesn’t have Hillary’s past, he doesn’t have Bernie’s admitted socialism or anti-capitalist views, and he looks like John F. Kennedy, and he has 10 years of executive experience as mayor (of Baltimore) and governor (of Maryland). So you really can’t ignore him, despite how people want to.”



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