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Editorial

U.S. Representative

Incumbent Bernard Sanders versus Mark Candon

Incumbent U.S. Rep. Bernie Sanders is facing off against Republican challenger Mark Candon for the seat Sanders has held since 1992. It's a race that offers Vermont voters a clear choice: Sanders and Candon agree on almost nothing.

The incumbent is one-of-a-kind: the only member of the House not affiliated with either major political party (although he often votes with the Democratic minority). Sanders supports the "little guy" issues. He's a proponent of labor unions, family and health issues an taxing wealthier Americans to support programs that help those less wealthy. He has a visceral reaction against big business, the military-industrial complex and almost anything Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich favors.

Mark Candon is Rutland stockbroker who served briefly in the state Legislature - as a Democrat. He switched parties during the past decade and is running, he says, because he believes the incumbent is ineffective and anti-business. As a member of the majority party in the House, the challenger believes he can work with the leadership there, including Gingrich, for Vermont interests.

A major issue of contention between the candidates is the current condition of the Social Security program. Candon believes the system can be fixed permanently by allowing those paying into it the option of investing a portion of their payments in the stock market. The market, he points out, has out-performed both inflation and most other forms of investment over the long haul. Sanders disagrees. Social Security, he says, is in no imminent danger of collapse and has adequate funding for at least the next 34 years. He believes it could be propped up permanently if the tax were extended to all

income instead of cutting off at \$68,400 as it does now.

As is usually the case, this election will be a referendum on the incumbent. Candon claims that, as an outsider, Sanders is without influence in the House - but the incumbent's record seems to say otherwise. Last year he joined with the two Vermont senators, for instance, to push through the Northeast Dairy Compact, which protects wholesale milk prices in New England. He was one of the few members of the House to vote against the balanced budget this year - because, he says, it cut \$115 billion in health care, including \$5 million designated for Vermont home health care. But subsequently, again working with Sens. Jeffords and Leahy, he was able to restore \$3 million of this health care funding to Vermont. Sanders may be a political party of one, but he also heads up a coalition of 58 House members known as the Progressive Caucus and he's the ranking minority member of the powerful banking committee.

On the Social Security issue, we think the challenger is dead wrong. The purpose of Social Security, we believe, is security. The market may pay well most of the time but, as anyone who's studied the results of his 401k recently can attest, sometimes it doesn't pay at all.

The lone drawback we see to Rep. Sanders' record is his unremitting and automatic opposition to the wealthy class. But it also seems to us that every other member of Congress spends most of his or her time seeking funds from, and working on the interests of, America's richest citizens. We're rather proud that Vermont's sole seat in the House is occupied by someone who works mostly for the rest of us.

For these reasons, we strongly urge Vermonters to return Bernie Sanders to Congress on Nov. 3.