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Mike Bloomberg to open campaign offices in West Palm, Boca

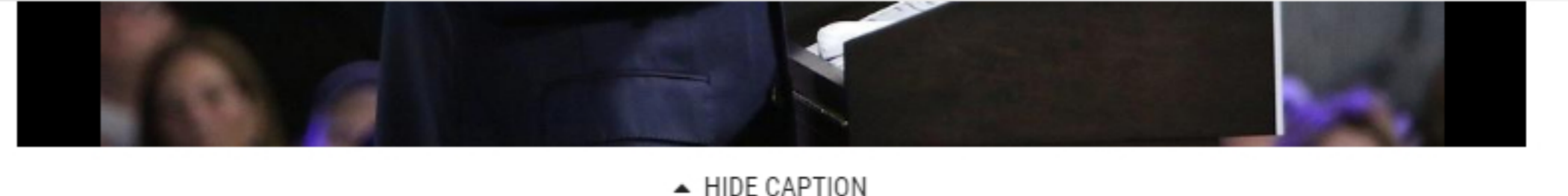
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Presidential candidate, former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg speaks to Jewish voters on Sunday, Jan. 26, 2020 at Aventura Turnberry Jewish Center in Aventura, Fla. (Andrew Uloza/Miami Herald via AP) - Andrew Uloza



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Mike Bloomberg's presidential campaign is making a big investment in Florida and specifically in Palm Beach County.

Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire New York businessman who has committed to spending \$500 million of his fortune to defeat **President Donald Trump**, is bringing his spare-no-expense, data-driven campaign to Palm Beach County with the opening of offices in West Palm Beach and Boca Raton.

Bloomberg, a late-comer to the **Democratic field of candidates** and no-show on the debate stage, has received little attention from the media and party. Bloomberg voluntarily benched himself from the Iowa caucus and three other early primaries, choosing instead to focus on delegate-rich primary states like Florida.

But in the aftermath of the Iowa caucus debacle that elevated Vermont U.S. Sen. **Bernie Sanders**, a self-described democratic socialist, and Pete Buttigieg, a politically inexperienced, openly gay, small town mayor, Bloomberg's electability is quickly being recognized.

"I've heard from a lot of people the last couple of weeks, Democrats and Republicans alike, who have told me how impressed they are with Mayor Bloomberg and hope that he'll take the campaign seriously in Florida," said Democratic U.S. Rep. **Ted Deutch of Boca Raton**. "The decision to open these offices is evidence that he is taking this seriously."

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So far, Bloomberg has run a single-issue campaign: defeat Trump. His position on policies that have dominated the Democratic race so far — Medicare for all, student loan forgiveness and climate change — are not widely known.

That is about to change — especially in Florida and specifically in Palm Beach County.

"I think it's no coincidence that Palm Beach County is getting so much attention," said Deidre Newton, Palm Beach County Democratic Party state committeewoman. "As Palm Beach County goes, so goes the state and as Florida goes, so goes the country."

In the run-up to the March 17 Florida primary, Bloomberg is cultivating endorsements from local officials, especially mayors. Former Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn and former Miami Mayor Manny Diaz have both endorsed Bloomberg and serve as the campaign's Florida co-chairs.

Incumbent West Palm Beach Mayor Keith James said he decided to endorse Bloomberg after hearing the three-term mayor of New York City speak at the U.S. Conference of Mayor's winter meeting in Washington, D.C., last month.

Although James said he agrees with Bloomberg's positions on climate change and gun control, he questioned Bloomberg's expansion of an aggressive police practice called "stop and frisk," which allowed police to question people they believed to be engaged in criminal activity on the street and frisk them for weapons.

Under Bloomberg's tenure as mayor, police stopped and questioned people — mostly young black and Latino — for weapons that rarely materialized. In November, just before announcing his candidacy, Bloomberg spoke at a black megachurch in Brooklyn, where he admitted he was wrong and apologized.

James said he was "delighted" that Bloomberg chose to open one of his campaign offices in West Palm Beach.

"I think it demonstrates his awareness of how key Florida will be as a state," James said. "Listen, I have no knowledge of this but I don't think it's an accident that he's opening two offices in the same county where the president has a home."

Bloomberg is not just targeting Democrats in the South Florida — the bluest region of the state with the greatest number of New York transplants and Jewish voters, said Scott Kosanovich is Bloomberg's Florida campaign director.

"We will have over 100 staff here this week, from the panhandle to the keys," said Kosanovich, who as campaign director for Florida House Victory oversaw the coordination of an unprecedented number of winning races during the 2018 midterm elections.

Bloomberg has also recently opened offices in Tampa, Orlando and Miami. Even before putting boots on the ground in Florida, the campaign was buying up ad space on local television stations.

By the time Bloomberg announced his presidential run on Nov. 24, he had already **lined up over \$1 million in television ad buys at local television stations in South Florida**, including \$238,250 at local network affiliates in Palm Beach County.

The spending hasn't let up. Bloomberg's campaign spent \$37,065 to run ads targeting adults 35-plus on WPTV Channel 5 during the first week of February. WPBF received \$34,995 and WPEC received \$13,706 to run ads during the same week.

Bloomberg's campaign is also targeting voters on Facebook, a platform Trump dominated during the 2016 campaign. As of Feb. 5, Trump had spent \$31 million on Facebook ads. Bloomberg was close behind, having spent \$29.4 million.

The campaign has already addressed some of Florida's unique voting blocks. During his first sweep through the state on the weekend of Jan. 24, Bloomberg launched United for Mike, a coalition of Jewish supporters, at the Aventura Jewish Community Center.

Bloomberg, who describes himself as a secular Jew, must compete with Trump's fierce support of Israel, demonstrated by his decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and a harsh crackdown on Iran.

As for Florida's Latino voters, Bloomberg is the only candidate to come out in favor of statehood for Puerto Rico, Kosanovich said. That stand so impressed former state Rep. Robert Asencio, a Miami Democrat, that he switched his endorsement from Joe Biden to Mike Bloomberg.

"As the weeks move on we'll continue to see more and more endorsements," Kosanovich said.

Like Bloomberg the businessman, who built his business media empire on data, numbers are also driving his campaign strategy. The unprecedented decision to sit out the first four primaries, all in states with few delegates, and instead focus on larger states like Florida, paid off, Kosanovich said.

"I don't think us not being there hurt us at all," Kosanovich said. "There's a good chance there will be four different winners out of four different states."

Bloomberg will also likely make his way to the debate stage on Feb. 19, courtesy of a change in rules that scraps the grassroots funding support threshold that candidates had to meet for prior debates. Because Bloomberg is funding his entire campaign, he has no donors — big or small.

Under the new rules, candidates can qualify by achieving minimum levels of support, between 10 percent and 12 percent in state and federal polls. Although Kosanovich declined to release the campaign's poll numbers in Florida, in a recent survey of more than 2,500 potential democratic voters in Florida, **St. Pete Polls** reported that 17% say that he would be their first choice, an uptick from the 9% he received three weeks prior in a **Florida Atlantic University** poll.

Bloomberg's West Palm Beach office is wedged between a beauty-supply store and veterinary clinic in a strip mall on North Military Trail anchored by a Publix. A Mike Bloomberg 2020 placard was taped over a sign left by the prior occupant, a shipping store called Goin' Postal. On Friday, staffers were painting walls and cleaning.

The campaign has not announced the whereabouts of the Boca Raton office.

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