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Sen. Rick Scott | Getty Images

## Scott slams Sanders in Spanish-language ad

By GARY FINEOUT and MARC CAPUTO | 03/10/2020 01:17 PM EDT



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TALLAHASSEE — Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) has a new foe stalking him in Florida: Republican Sen. [Rick Scott](#).

Scott launched a [Spanish-language ad](#) that slams Sanders for his past praise of Cuba's Fidel Castro, Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega.

The ad includes footage of Sanders from the 1980s saying that Castro had “totally transformed the society.”

If Democratic front-runner Joe Biden needed a nudge going into the March 17 primary, the Scott ad could provide it. The former vice president has a comfortable lead over Sanders in the Florida Democratic primary, which will award 219 delegates.

The ad is running in Miami, Orlando, Tampa and Fort Myers. The Scott campaign said the ad buy would be in the mid five figures. It lands as thousands of Floridians already are casting ballots — nearly 655,000 Democrats have already voted, according to the state Division of Elections.

Scott's interference in the Democratic primary is widely seen in Republican circles as a [warm-up act](#) for either his reelection or a 2024 bid for president, where he could face fellow Floridians Gov. Ron DeSantis or Sen. [Marco Rubio](#).

Independently wealthy, Scott made his mark in Florida politics as an outsider businessman. He spent at least \$149.5 million of his own money to win races for governor and U.S. Senate.

Scott spokesperson and advisor Chris Hartline on Tuesday drew attention to disputed claims by former a former U.S. political prisoner in Cuba, Alan Gross, [who told NPR](#) last week that Sanders visited him while he was incarcerated and did not get why people criticized the dictatorial regime.

“I don't know what's so wrong with this country,” Sanders said, according to Gross.

“We've heard these comments from Sanders before, but that's part of the problem,” Hartline said.

“On the cusp of being the presumptive nominee, he couldn't come up with a better answer. He's a terrible tactician,” Hartline said. “After years of saying the same thing about Castro, he couldn't say it better. The bluntness and cruelty the way he talks about this is incredible.”

Sanders' campaign refused to comment on the Gross narrative until an appearance on FOX News Sunday, where he denied making the remarks.

Sanders triggered a [firestorm in Florida](#) last month after a 60 Minutes interview in which he said Cuban people didn't “rise up in rebellion against Fidel Castro” because “he educated their kids, gave their kids health care, totally transformed society.”

The remarks alarmed many Florida Democrats who feared it could hurt down-ticket candidates in the state, which is home to many exiles who fled Latin America and Caribbean countries.

Many establishment Democrats in the state since have thrown their support to Biden.

A [poll released Tuesday](#) by Florida Atlantic University found that Biden had a commanding lead of 61 percent compared to just 25 percent for Sanders. The poll, which was taken after Super Tuesday, has a 4.9 percent plus or minus margin of error.



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