

# TOO SOON

## Candidates for president already kicking off race

**S**en. Ted Cruz announced this week that he is running for president. He's the first big name to officially declare his candidacy. It was all over the news media — and Fox.

For the rest of the country, it barely registered on the collective radar. It's only March 2015. It's way too early to start thinking about, let alone get excited about, the November 2016 presidential election. Only die-hard political junkies and the desperate-to-fill-24-hours-with-content news stations are paying much attention at this early stage.

But if you happen to be one of the misguided souls who fall into one of those categories, fear not, **crowdpac.com** has you covered. The website evaluates the positions of candidates from all over the political spectrum and allows you to donate to their campaigns.



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InSites

### Follow the money

The site looks at three criteria to determine where candidates stand on the issues: votes — their legislative record if they have ever been in office; speech — any public statements they've made, published material, social media commentary, sponsored bills, etc.; and money — who they've received money from and who they've donated money to. The money trail can be the most revealing.

The candidates are then placed on a sliding scale that goes from 10L (liberal) on the left to 10C (conservative) on the right. Currently on the site the three most liberal potential candidates are Bernie Sanders (8.3L), Elizabeth Warren (8.2L) and Al Sharpton (7.3L). The three most conservative potential candidates are Rand Paul (10+C), Ted Cruz (9.7C) and Scott Walker (7.8C). The + after a score indicates that a candidate's positions are so extreme that they exceed the range of the scale.

### Pledge support

The mission of Crowdpac is to take away the undue influence big donors have over the political process by educating individuals and making it easy for them to donate to candidates who share their views. You can pledge support to candidates who haven't officially declared, and your credit card won't be charged until they actually register with the Federal Election Commission.

The home page features a large, panoramic photo of the Washington Monument and the reflecting pool with the words "Together we can beat the big donors" superimposed over the image.

There are navigation links to the 2016 Election, Candidates, Issues and About, as well as a search box, across the top of the page.

Below the photo are links to several features, such as the Maryland senate race, the Crowdpac blog and a mildly interesting but kind of useless page that lets you see how liberal or conservative your name is.

The 2016 Election page is topped by the liberal/conservative scale with all the major potential candidates' pictures placed according to how they are rated. Below that, a matchup feature lets you select any two potential candidates, as well as some fantasy candidates, and compare their stats. It shows their place on the scale, various polling results, stances on selected issues, some biographical information and more. There also are a couple polls, links to articles and a few other items on the page.

The Candidates page allows you to select an issue, such as the economy or health care. You then indicate your position on the liberal/conservative scale for that issue. Pick a race, region or any of several other search filters and a list of candidates who share your position will be displayed. Clicking on a candidate's name gives you a short profile of him or her.

The Issues page serves the same purpose as the Candidates page. The main difference is that it briefly defines the issue and has the official Democratic and Republican positions. There also are links to articles and other information.

### No shortcuts

Crowdpac is cleanly designed and easy to navigate. Its simplicity and functionality allow you to browse without distraction. The problem I have with the site is it feels superficial. The simplistic labeling of candidates as either liberal or conservative doesn't provide the details and nuance needed to make an informed decision at the polls.

If you spend the time to compare positions on individual issues on the site and read the linked articles for more background, you can get a more detailed picture of the candidates. There's no such thing as a one-stop website with all the information you need to be an educated voter. If you want to be well informed, you have to do lots of research.

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