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DEMOCRATS

# Clinton dismisses controversies surrounding Benghazi, emails at event

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Hillary Clinton defended her handling of the 2012 Benghazi attacks and her use of a private email server as secretary of state, dismissing the controversies as “partisan games” in a speech in Iowa on Friday.

"They'll try to tell you it's about Benghazi, but it's not," Clinton said, pointing to Republican-led congressional inquiries that she said had "debunked all the conspiracy theories."

"It's not about emails or servers either. It's about politics," she said.

"I won't get down in the mud with them. I won't play politics with national security," Clinton said at the annual Wing Ding, a Democratic fundraiser in northern Iowa that attracted three other presidential candidates.

Clinton sought to take the scandals head on while presenting herself as combative, tough and prepared to fight Republicans in an effort to ultimately succeed President Barack Obama. Her appearance comes days after she agreed to turn over to the FBI the private serve she used a secretary of state. Republican lawmakers have said she was negligent in handling classified information.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders received loud cheers when he pointed to his opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline, which has been reviled by environmentalists and his vote against Iraq War in the Senate. Sanders' campaign has gained steam with the growing Clinton controversy.

Sanders, whose recent appearance at a Seattle event was disrupted by activists with the Black Lives Matter movement, also took steps to emphasize his civil rights record.

"No one will fight harder to end racism in America," he said.

Clinton's forceful defense started when she noted that the Supreme Court case Citizens United, started with a “hit-job film” about her.

“Now I’m in the crosshairs,” she said of Republicans.

Clinton said she would "do my part to provide transparency to Americans — that's why I'm insisting 55,000 pages of my emails be published as soon as possible" and turned over the server.

"I won't pretend that this is anything other than what it is: the same old partisan games we've seen so many times before," she said. "So I don't care how many super PACs and Republicans pile on. I've been fighting for families and underdogs my entire life and I'm not going to stop now."

Clinton also made light of the email probe on her Snapchat social media account. "I love it," she said. "Those messages disappear all by themselves."

Her speech included critiques of potential Republican rivals Scott Walker, Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio. But she saved her most pointed barbs for Donald Trump, saying the attention in the GOP race had centered on a "certain flamboyant front-runner." The country, she said, shouldn't be distracted. "Most of the other candidates are just Trump with the pizzazz or the hair."

The candidates spoke before about 2,000 Democrats at the Surf Ballroom, the site of the last concert by rock pioneers Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper before their fatal 1959 plane crash, later dubbed "The Day the Music Died."

Clinton and Sanders spoke first, prompting some activists to file out of the ballroom before former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley and ex-Rhode Island Gov. Lincoln Chafee took the stage.

O'Malley pointed to a laundry list of progressive proposals he would pursue if elected president, saying his years as Baltimore mayor and Maryland's two-term governor were about "action, not words."

"In tougher times than these, Franklin Roosevelt told us not to be afraid. In changing times, John Kennedy told us to govern is to choose," O'Malley said. "I say to you, progress is a choice."

Chafee took aim at Bush's recent critique of Obama's handling of Iraq, telling activists, "What kind of neocon Kool-Aid is this man drinking?"

Clinton kicked off a weekend of campaigning in Dubuque on Friday by outlining proposals for more quality child care on college campuses and additional scholarships to help students who are parents. The Democratic front-runner also picked up two endorsements aimed at reinforcing her standing among liberals: former Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin, a party luminary who served three decades in the Senate, and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, a union of nearly 600,000 members. Clinton was joining Harkin at the Iowa State Fair on Saturday morning.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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