



With Senate control at stake, New Hampshire Republicans are poised to nominate a Trump-like candidate

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MANCHESTER – New Hampshire closes out primary season Tuesday with a head-to-head between a Republican moderate and a far-right candidate who analysts say could endanger Republicans' chances of reclaiming the Senate majority.

Republicans are poised to nominate Don Bolduc, a Trumpy candidate who has expressed support for repealing the 17th Amendment, which allows the direct election of senators. He has also espoused former President Donald Trump's groundless claims the election was stolen.

The winner of the Republican primary will take on incumbent Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan, whose seat is seen as crucial to the Republican roadmap of retaking control of the Senate chamber.

Control of the Senate is now a coin flip: These are the 7 midterm election races to watch

If Bolduc takes the nomination on Tuesday, his electability could be a roadblock for Republicans heading into November, according to experts.

“He’s pretty much a lone wolf,” said Tom Rath, a former National Republican Committee member and advisor to several GOP presidential candidates, including George W. Bush and Mitt Romney. Rath noted Bolduc doesn't have the backing of any notable Republicans or organizations.

Bolduc, a retired brigadier general, has drawn the ire of New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, a popular Republican who boasts a

high approval rating of 60%, according to a recent poll from St. Anselm College.



That same poll found Bolduc leading his more moderate opponent, New Hampshire state Senate President Chuck Morse, 32%-16%. Another poll from the University of New Hampshire found Bolduc with an ever bigger lead over Morse – 43%-22%.

“He’s not a serious candidate,” said Sununu on WGIR radio. He said that even if Bolduc is the nominee, he will not endorse a “conspiracy theorist-type candidate.”

In a debate on Aug. 14, Bolduc doubled down on his claims of a stolen election by pointing to a letter he signed asserting that Trump won the 2020 election.

"Damn it, I stand by my letter," Bolduc said. "I'm not switching horses baby."

Sununu and national Republicans are putting their weight behind Morse.

“For the sake of this great state, we have to beat (Democratic incumbent Sen.) Maggie Hassan in November. The best candidate to do that is Chuck Morse,” Sununu said Thursday, announcing his endorsement days before the primary.

Governor's races across the country: Abortion, voting and COVID-19: Why we're eyeing these 10 governor's races in 2022 midterms

Outside spending floods New Hampshire

Once alarm bells started ringing that Bolduc could take the nomination, both national Republicans and Democrats started flooding the state with advertising money.

White Mountain PAC, a GOP-aligned PAC, poured \$4.6 million in an ad buy to both support Morse and criticize Bolduc.

In one ad, Morse is described as “one tough conservative” and vows Morse will finish construction of the wall on the southern border. Another ad from the PAC attacks Bolduc for his “crazy ideas,” which “won’t help us defeat Maggie Hassan.”

On the other hand, Senate Majority PAC, which has ties to Senate Democratic leadership, spent \$3.2 million on negative ads against Morse, reported Politico. The ads call Morse “another sleazy politician.”



Morse, who suddenly found himself in the middle of the spending spree, shrugged off the ads in an interview with USA Today. “When third parties get involved, I don’t have any control over it.”

“We’ll contend with everything we have to do,” Morse said.

'We are the quintessential purple state'

The Granite State currently has an entirely Democratic congressional delegation. For any Republican to take statewide office, they’ll have to appeal to independents and even Democratic leaning voters.

New Hampshire is “the quintessential purple state,” Rath said.

Republicans don’t think Bolduc has the appeal that Sununu has. Dave Carney, a strategist on Morse’s campaign, told USA TODAY that if Bolduc wins the nomination, he has no chance of defeating Hassan.

“His comments are so intense,” said Carney. “I don’t think independents are going to be appealed by his style and undisciplined message.”



Morse has significantly outraised Bolduc. In the latest quarterly reports, Morse outraised Bolduc by more than five to one, \$550,000 compared to Bolduc’s \$85,000. If Bolduc wins, he’s going to be at “a significant resource deficit against her (Hassan),” Rath said.

Bolduc’s possible nomination is part of a larger conversation nationwide among Republicans, whose once-rosy chances of reclaiming the Senate majority have seemingly slipped away to a coin flip. Democrats currently control the chamber with a razor-thin majority of 50-50 (Vice President Kamala Harris casts tie-breaking votes). The GOP needs to gain just one more seat to claim the majority.

A look at the House: Will Republicans flip the House in midterm elections? These 12 races will tell the story.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., also complained about “candidate quality,” when asked about his thoughts on the coming midterm elections during a Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce event last month. He did not mention Bolduc by name.

McConnell predicted that the House has a better chance of flipping Republican than the Senate, commenting that "candidate quality has a lot to do with the outcome" in Senate races.

Bolduc could insert himself into that growing conversation if he does emerge victorious on Tuesday night.

Bolduc’s campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Trump's voice has been quiet

Former President Trump's voice has been largely unheard in New Hampshire. Trump has teased an endorsement, saying he is “looking at that race very closely,” on conservative talk radio on Sept. 1.

He’s indicated a leaning for Bolduc, who has supported Trump’s baseless claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

“He said some great things, strong guy, tough guy,” said Trump.

Morse, according to reports from conservative media outlet NH Journal, will not be earning the backing of President Trump.

In an interview with USA TODAY, he said the 2020 election was not stolen.

When asked if he would have objected to the certification of electors on Jan. 6, Morse gave a prompt response: “No.”



A tough race no matter the winner

No matter if either Bolduc or Morse clinches the nomination on Tuesday, the nominee will still face a tough competitive race against Hassan.

Hassan, who served as the state's governor for four years prior to Sununu and six years in the Senate now, has high brand recognition among Granite Staters even though the St. Anselm College poll found her approval rating among voters at only 44%.

In ads across the region, Hassan has branded herself as "the most bipartisan senator." Rath said it's difficult for someone to tell if Hassan is a Democrat or Republican just from looking at the ads.

"It's good stuff," Rath said.



New Hampshire Republicans are also bracing for the fallout from the the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision, which overturned the constitutional right to an abortion. In New Hampshire, 71% of likely voters identified as pro-choice according to the poll by St. Anselm College.

Exclusive: Concern about abortion explodes among Democrats, fueling a push to vote

In New Hampshire, abortion is currently banned after 24 weeks, with exceptions if the life of the pregnant person is endangered or in cases of fatal fetal anomalies. In a debate hosted by WMUR on Thursday, the GOP candidates were asked if they would support New Hampshire's ban on the Senate floor.

Bolduc refused to answer, saying "It's hypothetical. I'm not gonna comment."

Morse embraced his role as the state's senate president when he moved the ban through the legislature and to Sununu's desk back in

July of 2021. "Yes I would support it. I was the one that worked hard to pass that law in New Hampshire," said Morse.

Despite the headwinds and poor polling numbers, Morse expressed confidence going into Tuesday.

"The polls, the best ones are going to be on the 13th, so looking forward to it," said Morse.