

POLITICS JULY 19, 2026

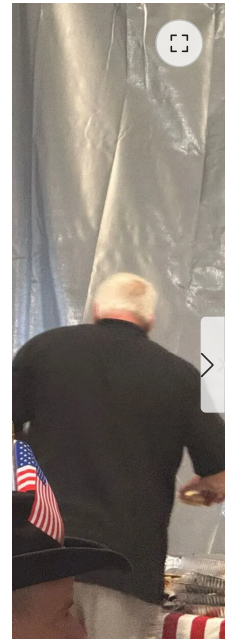
NH Republicans emphasize need for unity ahead of fall elections



Gabriel Perry
Union Leader Staff



Scott Brown delivers remarks in Gilford on Saturday. GABRIEL PERRY/UNION LEADER



Scott Brown speaks du

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Political enthusiasm among Republicans was relatively subdued Saturday evening in New Hampshire's reddest county.

GOP insiders and candidates gathered in Gilford, near Saltmarsh Pond, for the annual Bean Family BBQ. It's an event that draws large crowds to Belknap County each summer and allows New Hampshire Republicans to circle the wagons ahead of forthcoming elections.

"Politics is a bloodsport, and it's not over until it's over," Scott Brown said. He's a former U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, running for the Republican nomination to the upper house again, this time in New Hampshire.

On Saturday evening, though, there was little blood drawn at all. Brown's opponent in the primary, former U.S. Sen. John Sununu, was not in attendance at the event, and other candidates there stayed out of the mud. The common message throughout the event was the necessity of coalescing, achieving unity within the party,

In the 2024 general election, 55.5% of Belknap County residents voted for President Donald Trump, trailing only Coos County by a tenth of a percent. President Barack Obama was the last Democratic candidate to win Belknap County, and his was only the third Democratic victory there since 1888.

Each year at the barbeque, party leaders and influential Republicans break bread and discuss election strategy.

But on Saturday, it rained.

There were still around 100 people who attended the event, but it was notably subdued — both in enthusiasm and in rhetoric — in comparison to years past. Candidates and party figures alike hammered home the importance of simply going to the polls in this cycle and encouraged Republicans to vote absentee.

Along with Sununu, fewer candidates attended the event this year.

Brown delivered tempered remarks on Saturday evening. They were well received, and many of those in attendance spoke favorably of Brown's candidacy.

He touted his knack for delivering constituent services through being accessible to residents and pointed to his diplomatic experience, having served as the U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand from 2017 to 2020, in differentiating himself in the Senate race.

"My number one job is to fight for the citizens of New Hampshire," Brown said.

Brown also said he would never support an unfunded federal mandate, and that he's opposed to building wind turbines on the New Hampshire Seacoast.

Other candidates, like Brian Cole, who is running for the Republican nomination in the 1st Congressional District, struck a less conciliatory tone. He said he's concerned about border security and suggested building a fence to separate New Hampshire and Canada.

"Everybody forgets we have a border with Canada," Cole said.

Melissa Bailey, who dropped out of the race for the 1st Congressional District and endorsed Anthony DiLorenzo, said left-wing candidates are communists rather than Democrats.

"We are running against crazy people," she said.

Executive Councilor Joe Kenney, wearing a cowboy hat with an American flag affixed to the crown, is running for reelection. Serving District 1, Kenney spends much of his time driving between Berlin and New Durham and also has a reputation for delivering constituent services.

"I love public service," Kenney said. "I love serving my nation."

But for Kenney, there's much at stake in this election cycle. He pointed to the rising popularity of the progressive left wing of the Democratic party.

"We have to be vigilant, and we have to be very protective of our state against that," he said.

Kenney told the audience of a recent protest he observed and noted some of the individuals participating were unshaven and wore cut-off blue jeans. Those individuals don't represent most Americans, Kenney said, but rather something "fairly radical." Republicans should focus messaging on affordability this cycle, he said.

"How we are going to protect your tax dollar," he said. "That's going to be the big message in this campaign."

Scott Maltzie is the New Hampshire GOP's chairman. He emphasized the importance of expressing views in the public square and encouraged Republicans to author letters to the editor in New Hampshire's various news publications.

"If we don't talk, Democrats will fill that void," he said.

Maltzie also stressed the importance of getting Republicans to the polls and encouraged voters to vote by absentee ballot. He drew a distinction between New Hampshire and

Georgia and Pennsylvania, describing elections here as generally safe and secure. "If we show up, we win, and that's the message for the summer," Maltzie said.

gperry@unionleader.com



Gabriel Perry
Union Leader Staff

Reporter Gabriel Perry can be reached at gperry@unionleader.com