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Craig and Ayotte clash on plans for NH's housing market, immigration policies

Granite State News Collaborative | By **Gabriel Perry**, **Laconia Daily Sun**

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Zoey Knox / NHPR

Kelly Ayotte and Joyce Craig participated in a candidate forum at NHPR on Oct. 22, 2024.

The candidates for New Hampshire governor clashed Tuesday over housing, immigration and abortion rights during a forum at NHPR that illuminated sharp distinctions in how the two would lead the state.

Democrat Joyce Craig, the former mayor of Manchester, and Republican Kelly Ayotte

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trustworthiness and commitment to New Hampshire's well-being, as the contest enters its final two weeks before Election Day.

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In the forum, produced by the Granite State News Collaborative, Ayotte framed her candidacy as a means by which to continue what she considers to be the successful tenure of Gov. Chris Sununu's administration, while Craig emphasized what she described as Ayotte's willingness to change positions for political advantage.

Here's how the candidates discussed some key issues facing New Hampshire.

Housing

Asked about how to boost the stock of affordable housing, Ayotte suggested the state take into account the testimonies of housing developers by streamlining the permitting and approval process into a 60-day system that would include improved communication between state agencies.

"The state approval process, I think, could be much better and more efficient," Ayotte said. "I was just at a meeting with the New Hampshire Home Builders [Association] yesterday and they were telling me about a project that's been delayed 18-months at the state level."

Ayotte said she believes speeding approvals would drive down the prices of housing by increasing the available stock.

Craig, leaning on her record in Manchester where she said 2,000 new homes and apartments are in development, declined to directly say whether she supports steps taken in Maine and Vermont to limit single-family zoning. She said she'd favor an approach combining local zoning control with state "assistance," noting water and sewer infrastructure should be improved.

"My goal, as outlined in my housing plan, is to work with local communities to build the housing that they need, that works for them, but we need to build and we need to partner

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Craig, who is a small-time landlord herself, pointed to Ayotte's role on the board of [Blackstone](#), one of the nation's largest investment management companies. The company has been accused of profiting from the national housing crisis, and Craig said Ayotte's work with the company underscored her lack of commitment to improving the lot of low-income renters and would-be homebuyers.

Ayotte countered by saying she would resign her board position if elected to the corner office in Concord.

Immigration

Ayotte, who has faced criticism from some fellow Republicans for her earlier work on the U.S. Senate's ["Gang of 8"](#) immigration bill, which included a path to citizenship for people who entered the country illegally, said she supported that legislation not as an act of "amnesty" but to reform the legal process and boost funding for border security.

"My philosophy on immigration has been the same," Ayotte said. "I'm a supporter of legal immigration, I always have been. I think all of us can trace our history, to some extent probably, as being a legal immigrant, and that's important for our country, but I've always been against illegal immigration."

"My job as governor is to make sure the state remains safe and certainly it'll be a welcoming state for legal immigration, but we're going to make sure that we're not a sanctuary state," she said.

Craig said, when it comes to immigration, trust between law enforcement and local communities is paramount and said New Hampshire doesn't face the risk of the kinds of [costs](#) shouldered by taxpayers in Massachusetts because of the need to house incoming migrants.

"New Hampshire is not a sanctuary state, and it would not be a sanctuary state when I am governor," Craig said.

Craig said she'd work with the state's congressional delegation to fund security along the

“Security of our northern border is a federal issue, so I would work with our federal delegation to make sure that we have the funding necessary to get that done and would work with local law enforcement to ensure that our communities at the northern border have the resources that they need to keep them safe,” Craig said. “I don’t believe that that should be on the backs of local taxpayers.”

Abortion rights

Craig repeatedly called into question Ayotte’s position on abortion, noting Ayotte’s past support for a federal ban on most abortions after 20 weeks and her opposition to [state funding for Planned Parenthood](#).

“We cannot trust what she is saying right now,” Craig said. “We need to make sure that we have a governor who will protect and expand reproductive healthcare in New Hampshire, and that is my priority.”

Ayotte responded by reiterating her support for existing law on abortion in New Hampshire, and committing to oppose any bill that imposes additional restrictions.

“I will veto anything more restrictive that is sent to my desk, and I believe it’s consensus,” Ayotte said. “One of your jobs as governor is to bring people together around difficult issues and respect the consensus of the state, and I do.”

The general election is Nov. 5. NHPR and the Granite State News Collaborative will host another forum for the candidates for the state’s 2nd Congressional District on Monday, Oct. 28 at 12 p.m. in Concord.

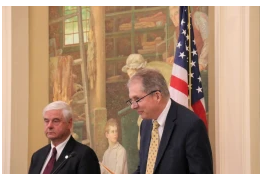
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