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## Booker calls on NH Democrats to unite after reopening votes fracture state party

By GABRIEL PERRY, The Laconia Daily Sun  
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Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) gives the keynote address at the Eleanor Roosevelt dinner in Nashua on Friday night, calling on the state party to unite ahead of next year's midterm elections. (Gabriel Perry/The Laconia Daily Sun photo)

NASHUA — Hot off the heels of strong Democratic performance in races up and down the ballot across the country, disagreements among the state's federal delegation about the deal to end the government shutdown were on full display Friday night.

The divide on political strategy was particularly noticeable when, during the New Hampshire Democratic Party's annual Eleanor Roosevelt dinner, U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) argued with a state lawmaker in the audience.

"So let me be clear, nobody wants to extend the Affordable Care Act tax credits more than me or more than Sen. [Maggie] Hassan," Shaheen told a large crowd in a ballroom at the Sheraton Nashua in justifying her decision to be part of brokering the deal with Senate Republicans to end the longest government shutdown in history.

"Then why did you vote for it?" state Rep. Heath Howard (D-Strafford), who is running to represent the Granite State's 1st Congressional District, yelled from the audience.

"You look at our record, and you tell me what you've done to protect the health care of Americans, and it's not even close to what we've done," Shaheen replied.

Her retort garnered considerable applause from the crowd of local, state and national Democrats, though disgruntled sentiments lingered throughout the evening.

Guests — there were 400 or so of them — dined on salad and cheesecake between speeches, which illustrated the stark internal divide over the shutdown deal. New Hampshire Democrats expressed strong optimism ahead of next year's midterm elections, noting they'd done well across the country in recent off-year municipal and state elections.

Shaheen, who is retiring, and Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) opted to vote with Republicans in the Senate last week on the bill to reopen the federal government. Shaheen and Hassan, along with Democratic Maine Sen. Angus King, crossed the proverbial aisle in negotiating an end to the shutdown, leaving members of their party frustrated with the omission of provisions to extend COVID-era health insurance subsidies.

"In a few moments, you're going to hear from our friend and colleague, Cory Booker," Hassan said. "He voted differently than [Sen.] Jeanne [Shaheen] and I did this week and, while we sometimes disagree on tactics, I know that he and I — like all of us in this room — are united in our goal of lower costs, standing up for American families and defending our democracy.

"The Republicans now have a matter of weeks to demonstrate to the American people whether they are serious about protecting health care, knowing they can no longer claim the excuse of a shutdown for inaction," Hassan continued. "It will be the American people who will hold them accountable if the Republicans fail in this most basic of visions."

Eight Senate Democrats voted in favor of the bill, which passed 60 to 40. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) was the lone Republican to break party ranks.

Booker, a Democratic senator from New Jersey, delivered the keynote address, and told the crowd that while he, Shaheen and Hassan generally agree on most things, he disagreed on their decision to vote with Republicans on the bill. Booker voted against the bill, and told Democrats they need to come together to fight for legislative wins.

"I have the privilege of every day serving with your two senators, and let me tell you something, I'm going to publicly disagree with Maggie," Booker said.

"I can count the times that I've disagreed with those senators on one hand and still have fingers left over. One thing I know about them is those other 99.9% of times that we agree, we're not fingers, we are a fist," Booker said.

Reps. Chris Pappas and Maggie Goodlander, New Hampshire's delegation to the House of Representatives, each voted "no" on the government funding bill. Pappas struck a cordial tone in Nashua on Friday night, despite his disagreement over the bill.

"To Sen. Shaheen and Sen. Hassan, no one can question your commitment to the people of New Hampshire," Pappas said. "I know that, if there's a way to deliver a bipartisan victory in the Senate on extending the Affordable Care Act subsidies, you're going to be in the room, and you're going to figure it out."

Shaheen's daughter Stefany Shaheen is running for Chris Pappas' seat in the House, as he gears up for a run to take Shaheen's seat in the Senate. Stefany Shaheen expressed publicly her disagreement with Jeanne Shaheen's vote on the bill. Booker, referencing formative political fights of the previous century, sought to galvanize cooperation and a fighting spirit among Democrats on Friday.

"Now I ask you, New Hampshire: As we are months away from the midterm elections that will shape the destiny of our country, what will you do? Will you stand up? Because my story is your story — people stood for you, and fought for you, and cried for you, and bled for you, and died for you," Booker said. "Will we stand up, with the same courage of our ancestors and fight like they fought for America? Will you stand up?"

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