

## **Stuck in the Middle with New Hampshire Politics**

*By Rich Gulla, President, State Employees' Association*

Standing amidst the Hall of Flags, Governor Sununu to the left of me, and New Hampshire Senate Minority Leader Donna Soucy to the right of me, I wonder what am I doing here? I look about the hall waiting for NH Secretary of State David Scanlan to begin his words, and I am humbled to be in this hallowed place. A multitude of media from all over the country have positioned themselves in front of us. They are jockeying for the best spot filling most of the room. I notice some of the journalists represent international media companies.

As the crowd inches closer, collectively anticipating Secretary Scanlan's announcement of the New Hampshire Primary date, I reflect on how I ended up in this situation. I am trying to make some sense of it all. I notice there are more and more people standing with me. I recognize people like the Chairs of the New Hampshire Democratic Party and our Republican Party, and there are a sea of state representatives that I do not recognize. Later, I recognized the presence of the children of two former Governors, whose fathers played pivotal roles in organizing the inaugural historic presidential primary.

Secretary Scanlan steps forward, commencing his remarks, and the date is unveiled – January 23, 2024, as foreseen by political pundits. The Statehouse buzzes with activity, news reports heard round the world. Still in the middle of things, I keep reflecting on how it's a true honor to represent New Hampshire Labor in this sacred space. The democratic process, revered for its uniqueness and inclusivity, takes center stage in my reflections.

Beyond the election day and this momentous press conference, I ponder the significance of candidates engaging in countless town halls, facing questions from unreserved Granite Staters. Growing up in Hillsboro, democracy was ingrained in my upbringing—a family tradition intertwined with the essence of New Hampshire. Candid visits to small towns added a delightful dimension to the democratic experience.

Recollections transport me back to the early 1970s, where, as a child, I reluctantly attended town hall meetings with my parents. Boredom prevailed as residents passionately voiced their opinions, exhibiting joy or frustration depending on the outcomes. However, with age, an appreciation for the impassioned democracy in our midst developed.

Last year, the fervor and our unique civil solidarity were evident in Bedford, where our Union (SEA/ SEIU Local 1984) represents police officers. Standing alongside them at a town hall, we found support from the fire department, emphasizing the injustice of unequal offers. It was a collective stance against a deviation from the New Hampshire way. I was proud to be there and support them every step of the way.

Grateful to be present as a labor leader and an engaged citizen, I still cherish the honor of Secretary Scanlan's invitation to stand amidst New Hampshire politics, surrounded by leaders from our vibrant political landscape. Anticipation builds for the January town halls where we unite to choose the next leader of the free world.

Allow me to share a memory from my New Hampshire childhood encountering President Ronald Reagan. I remember being at a town hall meeting and watching him walk into the room. I remember his stride, his smile and his air of confidence. He looked and carried himself with the gravitas of a US president. We all deserve to vote for someone who fills us with confidence and who will bring dignity to the White House. A president who you want to be stuck in the middle with.