

Fergus Cullen: Welcome to New Hampshire, Scott Brown

FERGUS CULLEN

DEAR SEN. Scott Brown: Thank you for headlining that holiday fundraiser in Nashua on behalf of the New Hampshire Republican Party. I hope the disappointing presence of some chronically disgruntled activists who protested your appearance – call them “Conservatives for Jeanne Shaheen” – didn’t give you the wrong impression. The vast majority of New Hampshire Republicans welcomes you and is glad you’re at least considering running for the United States Senate from here.

Sure, it’s unusual for someone to move to a new state to run, but I don’t remember many of the Democrats who call you a carpetbagger and talk of rotten boroughs quibbling much when Chicago Cubs fan Hillary Clinton ran from New York and won in 2000. In the 19th century, James Shields served from three states – Illinois, Minnesota and Missouri.

New Hampshire has liked past Massachusetts senators so much that we erected a statue of one, Daniel Webster, outside the State House in Concord. New Hampshire’s senior senator gets the privilege of using Webster’s old desk.

If anyone can pull this off, it’s you. You’ve been a neighbor. You were born at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and have owned your home in Rye for more than 20 years. (What’s the difference between Scott Brown and Congresswoman Annie Kuster? Brown always paid his New Hampshire property taxes.) We’ve shared the same media market, so you are well known and well regarded here. We root for the same sports teams. A lot of New Hampshire voters are from Massachusetts or work there. In a real sense, you’ve already represented them.

Deciding to take on Senator Shaheen is a big enough challenge without having a tough primary. If you run, I’m sure you expect to have to earn the GOP nomination, but don’t relish the prospect of fighting for it.

Don’t worry. Yes, the New Hampshire Republican Party has a right wing and Tea Partiers, too many of whom counterproductively put their energy into criticizing Republicans who win instead of defeating Democrats. But don’t mistake a couple hundred vocal anti-everyone activists as representing the mainstream of the party or a majority of primary voters. If Ronald Reagan were campaigning for President today, some Tea Partiers would picket him for being impure, too.

Some on the far right and newer activists – those who weren’t around 12 years ago – may be initially attracted to former Sen. Bob Smith’s candidacy, an ironic choice for anyone with a stated interest in party purity. Wait until they learn more about his apostasies like quitting the party and endorsing John Kerry for President.

As for the old guard, when Smith calls his former supporters and donors to get the band back together again, he’s going to discover that Paul moved, Ringo gave up performing, and John and George are dead. The Smith campaign, if he even files in June, will play out like Mayor Skeffington’s in *The Last Hurrah*. If you haven’t read the novel, spoiler alert: The old war horse loses because time has moved on.

Jim Rubens can still emerge as a quality Senate candidate, whether or not you run, and he deserves more attention and respect than he’s gotten since announcing his candidacy. But if Rubens were the establishment’s first choice, we wouldn’t be having this little conversation, would we?

No, the bulk of the party isn’t looking for a mythically perfect candidate who raises unicorns on a farm. We want the person with the best chance to win, and that’s you. The nomination is yours if you ask for it. So it really comes down to this: Do you think you can defeat Shaheen?

She’s formidable, sure. But as the deciding vote in favor of Obamacare, Shaheen is as personally responsible for this policy and political disaster as any senator. If Obamacare becomes an albatross for Democrats, she’s vulnerable to the right opponent, and her team knows it. She nearly lost the governor’s office in 2000, lost the senate race in 2002, and she barely won in 2008 in a great year for Democrats.

New Hampshire is still a swing state, available to both parties. Make the election a choice. People are going to be open to you.