

## 2016 Gubernatorial Questionnaire – Mark Connolly, Democrat

**1. Many businesses and economists warn that New Hampshire faces a significant shortage of skilled workers, particularly young workers. What can state government do to address this?**

Companies innovate when they have a skilled workforce. Right now, we face an economic paradox in New Hampshire—college graduates leave the state to find jobs, and yet we have advanced manufacturing and tech companies that are struggling to reach full employment. We need to continue fostering New Hampshire’s historical spirit of creativity and become not just the Granite State but the Innovation State.

By aligning education with industry needs, we can keep the next generation in-state while spurring economic growth. State government can play an important role in helping to foster cooperation between schools and businesses, just like Albany International is doing with Great Bay Community College. By bringing together education and private-sector leaders to create high-school and college curricula that give graduates the tools needed for modern jobs, we can create a talent pipeline for New Hampshire businesses and guarantee a livelihood in-state for New Hampshire’s next generation.

**2. What are your plans for reviving the economy in New Hampshire’s rural regions, particularly the North Country?**

The North County and other rural parts of New Hampshire need infrastructure updates, including improved roads and bridges and broadband access. These changes demand collaboration among federal, state, and municipal governments and local businesses, but reviving these communities will take the modern infrastructure we currently lack.

Next, we need to implement education programming at every level aligned with local business needs, to ensure that graduates leave school with career-ready skills matching the needs of nearby employers—or with access to job training that sets them up for productive professions in the local economy. Targeted tax credits would help attract new businesses and startups to these areas, creating additional jobs for local residents.

We also need to consider the aspects in which rural communities need many of the same support structures as urban ones—affordable housing, access to comprehensive healthcare, and action against the opioid epidemic—and implement responsive policies statewide.

**3. Many businesses complain about New Hampshire’s relatively high costs for health care and energy. What can the state do to alleviate this?**

We pay some of the highest energy costs in the country, hurting families and businesses alike, especially in the winter. Our first step must be diversifying our energy base. Integrating renewable resources like wind, hydro, and solar power more seamlessly into our grid will go a long way toward bringing down costs. Already, businesses can access these kinds of cutting-edge technology, and state programs exist to help ease the cost of transitioning to more energy-efficient operations—which, in turn, save money over time.

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With regards to healthcare, the solution is clear: we need to make the vital Medicaid expansion permanent. The New Hampshire Health Protection Plan keeps 48,000 Granite Staters insured and healthy—of course we should make it permanent. We cannot keep playing politics every time this issue arises, and when more of our people get access to affordable care, that's a good change that we have to continue.

### **4. What is your position on a sales or income tax?**

We do have a revenue problem in this state, but I believe that we should spend our time on realistic ways to raise that revenue—not on revisiting long-settled policy debates. Our economy is still recovering from the Great Recession, and passing an income tax or sales tax would only slow that growth; it simply is not the right fit for our state today.

We do need to address the issue of revenue, however, and that begins with growing the economy, which will in turn create new jobs and generation additional revenue. We have not yet fully recovered from the Great Recession, and revenues will continue to increase as we do so; in the meantime, we should focus on more realistic solutions to raise our revenue to pay for things like education, expanded healthcare, and infrastructure investment.

### **5. Do you support the recent cuts to the state's business taxes? Would you support keeping the rates as they now stand, cut further, or raise to previous levels?**

When it comes to determining the best sources for state revenue, our most important step is to reconsider the existing revenue sources we have—especially the business-profits tax. It's been too long since we updated that, and we need to take a hard look its structure, including who pays it and at what rates. Simply by implementing the existing tax more carefully and more deliberately, we can increase revenues fairly and effectively.

Right now, however, the Department of Revenue cannot make estimates based on individuals or companies that are not paying this tax at all; as Governor, it would be my responsibility to make sure various state agencies talk to each other to share that kind of relevant information. Together, we could establish a reliable, replicable methodology to determine those specifics going forward.

### **6. What new revenue sources, if any, would you support as governor? Do you support legalized casino gambling in New Hampshire?**

In addition to reconsidering the business-profits tax, we should take a closer look at the levels and applications of the gas and cigarette taxes. New Hampshire has the lowest rates in New England, and those could be viable sources of new revenue to fund our education and healthcare needs.

Casino gambling, however, is not the solution to our revenue problem. I am not anti-gambling and I remain open-minded, but the New England market is simply too saturated right now. There are already 11 casinos in the region, with another three coming in Massachusetts. Yet, across New England, casinos in Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut, and Rhode Island are not living up to their promises, and there are already significant worries in Massachusetts.

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Building a casino here 15 or 20 years ago may have been a sound idea, but I firmly believe that this is not the right move for New Hampshire today.

### **7. What role should state government play in reducing inequities in the quality and cost of public schools across New Hampshire?**

Our government had failed to properly fund public education for decades, and the current funding formula has proven insufficient in meeting the needs of modern students in many places. To reduce rampant inequality, we must begin by implementing targeted aid—even if it requires a Constitutional amendment.

Communities that need more resources should get more resources, plain and simple. We can look at a combination of districts' economic indicators, English-as-a-Second-Language needs, hot-meal programs, and income inequality to make those determinations.

A portion of those funds should also go toward increasing teacher pay—especially in struggling schools that need more great instructors—and toward early-childhood education programs, universal kindergarten, and restoring funding to the University System of New Hampshire to the pre-2011 level of \$104 million.

With a more equitable and informed distribution of funds, every New Hampshire student would get the same opportunities to succeed, no matter where they live.

### **8. What is your position on charter schools?**

Public schools should be our top priority—at the state level, that means ensuring they receive fair, adequate funding. Charter schools do have a role to play in our system, both by offering alternative methodologies and by filling specific niches that their mainstream counterparts cannot. In many cases in plenty of states, including New Hampshire, charter schools have offered public-school students unique and high-quality educational opportunities, and students in our state should have such opportunities where appropriate.

That said, charter schools must always be held to the same standards to which we hold our public schools, without exception. Any and all applicants for creating a charter school should be carefully vetted for fitness, rigor, and funding consistency, and the entire evaluation process should be transparent to relevant stakeholders. Once in session, charter schools must meet the same certification requires that other public schools do, including consistently issuing state standardized tests.

### **9. What changes would you support for the state's public higher education system? Should the state increase its share of funding for the 4-year or 2-year systems?**

We must align their coursework with our economic needs—ensuring that every graduate has career-ready skills. But change begins with properly funding higher education: as Governor, I would restore funding to the University System of New Hampshire to the pre-2011 level of \$104 million and offer

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additional incentives to students such as debt forgiveness for joining in-state workforce after graduation.

We can also expand certificate, dual-admission, and college-credit attainment programs in high school, equipping graduates to compete with their peers in other states and countries—without having to commit the time or money to a full four years at a university.

In addition, further synergizing the Community College System of New Hampshire with the University System of New Hampshire would let students to seamlessly transfer credits earned towards a four-year degree and help them to reach their potential in the world of higher education while remaining in the Granite State.

### **10. What is your assessment of the state’s approach to combating the opioid crisis? Do more resources need to be devoted to any specific response (law enforcement, treatment, etc.)?**

As Governor, keeping Granite Staters safe will be my top priority; today, that means tackling the opioid epidemic head-on. Ending this public-health crisis will not happen overnight, but we cannot delay in taking action. To fully address it, we must implement better data analysis and intergovernmental coordination with external stakeholders, more effectively treat the people caught in the throes of addiction, and implement anti-drug educational programming in our school and empower community leaders to serve as allies.

Additionally, though the response to this epidemic must be compassionate and nuanced, law enforcement is an essential part of reversing this tide and preventing it from recurring. We should build on Governor Hassan’s leadership by fully funding and supporting Granite Hammer, Drug Courts, and other established channels—but that support must be paired with corrections reform and interdiction and takeback programs through local police departments.

Working together, New Hampshire can meet this challenge.

### **11. What changes, if any, would you make to New Hampshire’s laws regarding abortion?**

I have always supported reproductive rights, access to safe and affordable healthcare, and the principles that Planned Parenthood represents. I voted against “Right to Life” legislation as a state legislator in the 1970s, just a few years after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and my position has remained as strong in the intervening years, without reservation.

New Hampshire should offer a consistent approach towards reproductive health and the myriad issues associated and correlated with its comprehensive provision; anything less is a disservice to Granite State patients. The back-and-forth of such policy in recent years has left providers struggling, patients confused, and businesses trying to determine whether our government can act responsibly and decisively in the first place.

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Our state needs to consistently support providers like Planned Parenthood that connect patients to comprehensive reproductive healthcare—including abortion—and, as Governor, I'd prioritize supporting their programs on behalf of all Granite Staters.

### **12. What changes, if any, would you make to New Hampshire's existing gun laws?**

We do not do enough in our country to ensure that guns are kept out of the hands of those who shouldn't have them, and the tragedies in Orlando and countless other places nationwide underscore just how desperately we need a change.

To begin, I would support a ban on military-style assault weapons, closing the gun show loophole, and instituting stronger and more comprehensive universal background checks, effective in every state. It is also past time that we took action to keep guns out of the hands of violent criminals and the dangerously mentally ill.

These are not partisan issues—90 percent of Americans support universal background checks, for instance, and nearly 75 percent of NRA members do, too. There is no lack of public will—but there is a lack of common sense and political courage. We need stronger leadership at the federal level to institute real, lasting change.

### **13. New Hampshire's governorship is widely considered among the "weakest" in the country. How specifically do you think the office can be best used to bring about change?**

The most important roles of New Hampshire's Governor are keeping Granite Staters safe, setting budget priorities, and laying out a vision for the state's future. The position already allows a strong leader to effect change—that bully pulpit is an important lever in our democracy, and, if the Governor is willing to work across the aisle, it can produce incredible progress. Governor Hassan's work on the Medicaid expansion and in calling for a special legislative to deal with the ongoing opioid crisis are both fine examples of this principle in action.

As Governor, I would continue in this tradition, working with collaborators in and out of government to ensure public safety and better funding for systemic priorities like education and infrastructure throughout the Granite State. I would also propose that future New Hampshire Governors be elected to a four-year term, allowing each to act boldly without having to constantly campaign.

### **14. What is the most important issue facing New Hampshire that's not being discussed in this campaign?**

The current stabilization-and-cap funding formula for public education in New Hampshire has been challenged in court—and that should be proof enough that it is not working for New Hampshire.

Yet education funding cannot turn into a political calculation; every New Hampshire student deserves the same opportunities, regardless of geography. We need to direct aid to the neediest communities and ensure that students are not left behind in any district. So, in addition to increasing funding levels across the board, we need to rework the state's contributions to public schools.

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That starts with putting more resources in the classroom. We should consider consolidating administrative responsibilities across school districts to reduce costs elsewhere. School-building aid should be incorporated into the education funding formula, too; students cannot prepare to succeed in crumbling facilities and outdated structures, and we cannot ask local districts to take precious dollars from teacher salaries or other priorities.