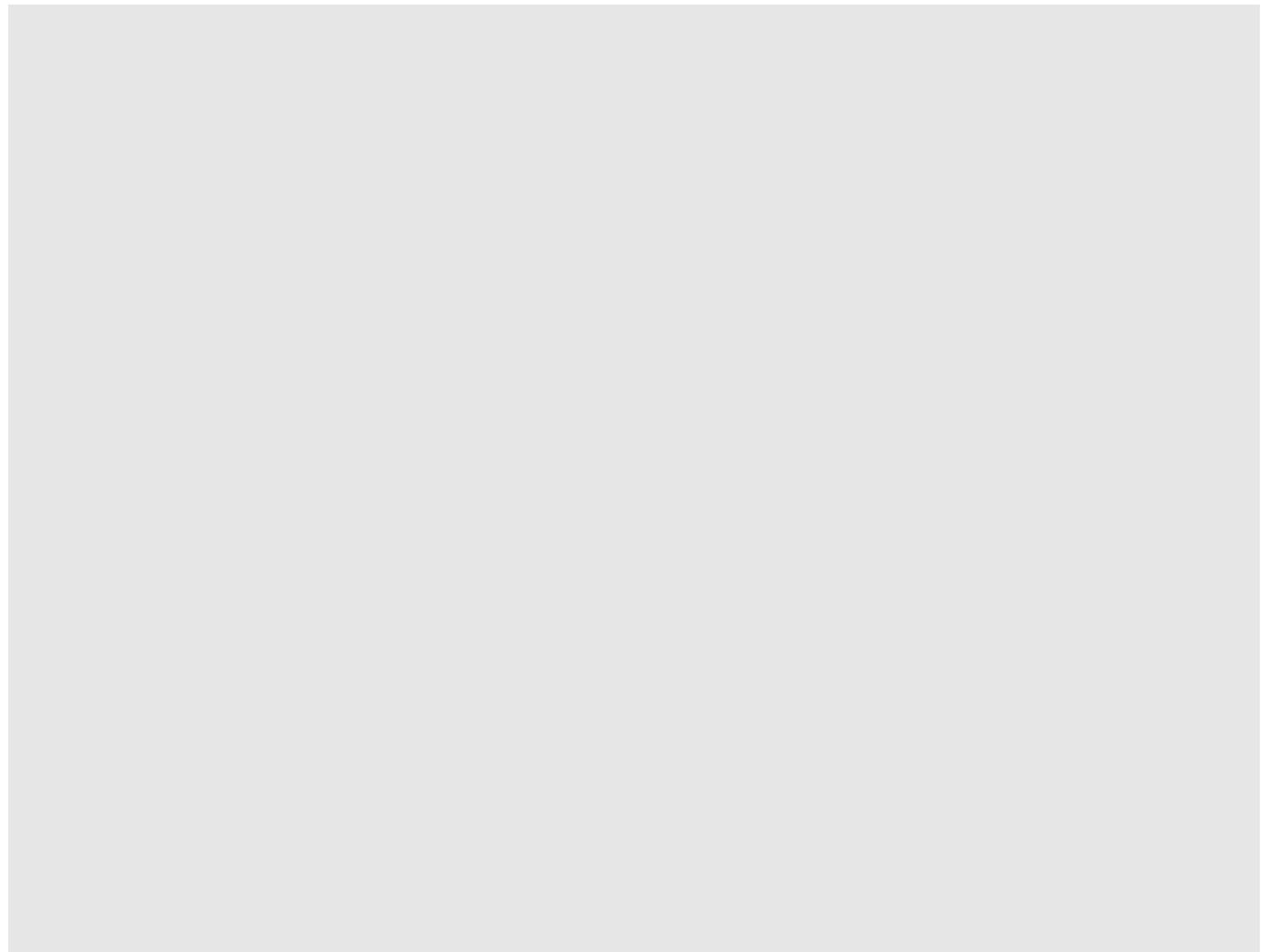


http://www.unionleader.com/opinion/columnists/nh-voices-terry-shumaker-and-steve-duprey---/article_d8f597ee-d72f-55b1-b4c7-c56fd1db2303.html

NH Voices: Terry Shumaker and Steve Duprey -- Secretary Gardner should be re-elected

By Terry Shumaker and Steve Duprey Nov 15, 2018



FOR THE FIRST time in years, the election for Secretary of State may be contested when our Legislature convenes in early December. As a result, the lawmakers elected Nov. 6 may well have to decide whether Secretary Bill Gardner or someone else is best suited to hold the office that is in charge of our elections, regulating lobbyists and many other functions.

One of the most important roles of the New Hampshire Secretary of State is protecting our first-in-the-nation Presidential Primary. The 2020 election will mark the 100th anniversary of our state's hosting the lead-off primary, which helps shape presidential candidacies and elections every four years. The primary is an integral part of our state's identity and a significant factor in this small state's influence on the national stage.

Since the 1980s, both national political parties and at least seven other states have mounted serious challenges to our coveted place in the calendar. Our primary has been threatened in eight of the last 10 presidential election cycles. We are convinced that our state would no longer be first without two key factors.

First, Granite State Republican and Democratic leaders have never allowed defending the various challenges to our Primary to become partisan, or to be used by one party against the other for political advantage.

Secondly and most importantly, Secretary of State Gardner, working with leaders on both sides, has brilliantly, and often quietly, maneuvered using his legal authority to set the primary's date to protect our century-old tradition.

We believe the key to his success has been that he was not a partisan Democrat or Republican with political ambitions, but a dedicated public servant who is fully trusted by both parties to do the right thing without concern for his own political future or that of any particular presidential candidate.

Unlike in Massachusetts and other states, our Secretary of State was not on the ballot here earlier this month. In 1784, the drafters of our state's Constitution decided that just two offices, that of State Secretary and Treasurer, would be chosen by our "Senators and Representatives assembled in one room."

Of course, they knew these officials would be responsible for precious things — our money and our votes. They clearly trusted that the legislators would choose wisely if those of various political persuasions voted equally and together at the same time in the same place.

Our Legislature has also recognized that this office should be above partisan politics. By statute it has mandated that the election for Secretary of State “shall be conducted without regard for the party affiliation of the candidates.”

Some decades ago, before Secretary Gardner took office, when other states tried to jump ahead of us on the primary calendar, our Legislature recognized the need for a statute to provide a faster mechanism than legislative action to set the date of the contest to protect us from such challenges.

Various procedures were debated, including that the date be set by a legislative committee or the governor.

Then Gov. Meldrim Thomson was adamant that politics and those aligned with presidential candidates be kept out of the date-setting process and made it clear he would only sign a bill that gave that authority solely to the Secretary of State.

Thus, since 1975 the date of the New Hampshire Primary has been the sole prerogative of that office.

This law has served us well.

Well prior to the 1984 primary, the Democratic National Committee dispatched a high-ranking official to push Secretary Gardner to move our primary to a later date to comply with DNC rules.

Gardner declined, as it would have violated our statute by putting our primary too close to Vermont's. New Hampshire was threatened for months that no Democratic delegates would be seated at the convention. The Secretary stood his ground, and ultimately the DNC relented.

In 1995, Delaware set its primary for the Saturday after ours – closer than seven days and in violation of our statute.

In response, Secretary Gardner delayed so long in setting the date that candidates on both sides filed for our primary without knowing its date.

When Republican candidates came in to file, our Secretary lobbied them not to run or campaign in Delaware, to which they all ultimately agreed.

Working through Granite State Democratic leaders, Gardner also sought to convince President Clinton, who was fond of our state and primary, not to participate in Delaware. When the White House called Gardner to tell him that the President would not file in Delaware, their challenge collapsed.

At the Democratic Convention in 2004, a commission was formed to study the primary calendar and make recommendations. When the commission convened, talk quickly turned to putting states ahead of New Hampshire, and ultimately Nevada was.

Secretary Gardner moved our date up and then using quiet diplomacy with state officials he knew there persuaded Nevada not to engage in a game of "leapfrog" with us.

Again, our traditional position was preserved thanks to his actions.

Bill Gardner has, when necessary to protect our primary, politely but firmly stood up to governors and party leaders from New Hampshire and other states. When he first ran for the position, he pledged that he would never seek higher office, and he has not.

He has served with the highest integrity. His non-partisan approach has earned the utmost respect and trust from leaders on sides here as well as in other states.

Based on our firsthand experience working with him, we believe Secretary Gardner deserves another term.

Steve Duprey was New Hampshire Republican state chairman for eight years, and currently serves on the Republican National Committee. Terry Shumaker is a former member of the Democratic National Committee and United States Ambassador. Both live in Concord and have worked on many New Hampshire Primary campaigns.

<]