



New Hampshire Liberty Alliance

Becoming a State Representative

Imagine for a moment that you know nothing about New Hampshire government or politics, and someone approaches you and suggests that you run for State Representative. Do you qualify? What's involved with running a campaign? What is the life of a State Representative like, and is it right for you?

This guide was created to answer these questions and more. It is our hope that it contains everything you might need to know in order to make a well-informed decision about whether or not to run for State Representative.

NOTE: In the interest of simplicity, this guide assumes you will be running as a Republican or Democrat. We hope to soon publish an edition of this guide aimed at individuals considering third party or independent status.

THE BASICS

Can I Really be a State Representative?

The answer is most likely "yes." The New Hampshire House is truly a "citizens legislature," and with 400 members, it's one of the most accessible in the country. It will require a moderate time commitment for part of each year, and some effort during the election/campaign, but most people manage to integrate being a Representative into their otherwise normal lives. Most people already have the skills and background needed to be an effective Representative. You just need a willingness to serve and do the right thing for New Hampshire citizens and taxpayers. Most importantly, becoming a State Representative is a powerful way for you to further the cause of liberty in the State of New Hampshire.

What are the Requirements?

You must be at least 18 years of age by the day of the Primary Election (September 9, 2008). You must be a resident of New Hampshire for two years by the day of the General Election (November 4, 2008). You must be a registered voter (registered with the party you plan to run in). You must live in the town or ward in which you intend to run. Lastly, you must not be a federal employee.

Other than the above requirements and a willingness to volunteer your time to participate in the legislature, there are no prerequisite skills or experience. State Representatives come from all educational and occupational backgrounds.

What is the Time Commitment?

As a Representative, you are expected to be present at the State House in Concord during legislative session. Perfect attendance is not expected – this is recognized as a volunteer position. The House is in session from early January through May/June. The full House meets on most Wednesdays from 10:00am – 4:00pm. Party caucuses are usually held just prior to House sessions. Individual committees meet on Tuesdays and/or Thursdays. Your presence is needed more frequently in your committee from January through March, progressively decreasing March through June. You will know the bill schedule ahead of time, so you can make the best use of the time you have to give.

State Representatives are elected to two year-terms. Each year is called a "legislative session." The session officially lasts January through June, although you may have some light interim committee duties between sessions.

THE JOURNEY

Starting

The first step is filing two forms and paying \$2. It really is that simple and affordable! You must file between Wednesday, June 4 and Friday, June 13, 2008, between 8:00am and 5:00pm with your local town or city clerk. The clerk will have the necessary forms available:

RSA 15-A Financial Disclosure Form
www.sos.nh.gov/RSA%2015-A%20NEW%20FORM.pdf

Declaration of Candidacy
(available at the city clerk's office)

You will be running in your home district. Each district has one or more Representatives, proportional to population. The first election is your Party Primary. You will compete with other candidates from your party for nomination. For example, if there are three seats, the top three vote getters win the nomination and move on to the General Election. (Sometimes there are only three candidates running for those three seats, in which case you're not likely to lose!) In the General Election, the nominees of both parties compete for the seats. Once again, if there are three seats, the top three vote getters win the seats and become State Representatives.

The Party Primaries are on Tuesday, September 9, 2008. The General Election is on the first Tuesday in November (November 4, 2008).

Campaigning

The intensity of your campaign will vary with the size of your district, but in general you should expect to spend up to \$500 for each election (Primary and General). If you spend more than that,

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you will be required to file financial reports with the Secretary of State. Your only expenses are likely to be signs and printed literature. Most campaigns do not purchase conventional advertising, but having supporters write letters to the editors of local papers can be effective.

You will spend most of your time going door to door in your district, meeting and talking to your constituents (registered voters in your district). In rural areas, door to door is not always practical but there are many creative alternatives for getting your name out there. It helps to have a few volunteers to put up signs and distribute literature at busy places and events, but campaigning entirely on your own is quite realistic and commonly done. The key is to meet as many people as possible, as many times as possible, to maximize the exposure of your name and ideas. Getting involved in your community and volunteering locally is highly recommended. Often, it's as easy as using your existing personal and professional networks to spread the word.

Entering Office

After you win the General Election on November 4, 2008, you will be invited to a three day (Tuesday through Thursday) House-sponsored training session for freshman Representatives which takes place in late November, 2008. The NHLA also offers coaching to new Representatives to help them prepare and maximize their effectiveness.

You will be sworn in on the first Wednesday of December (December 3, 2008), which is also called Organization Day, during which the Representatives elect a Speaker of the House, House Clerk, etc. The legislative session officially starts on the first Wednesday after the first Tuesday in January (January 7, 2009).

We recommend that you learn the New Hampshire Constitution, Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure, 2000 Edition (www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/summaries/017180-sum.htm), and the House Rules (www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/abouthouse/houserules.htm). It is usually not recommended for freshmen to submit legislation in their first year. They are instead encouraged

to focus on becoming familiar with the procedure and environment. Nearly a third of all Representatives each term are freshmen, and confusion and bewilderment are both normal and expected. Your party will assign you a mentor.

There are a number of standing committees in the House, each dedicated to reviewing a particular area of law (e.g., Education, Criminal Justice). All Representatives are assigned to a committee by their party leader in the House. You will be asked for your top three choices, and there's a good chance you'll get your first choice. For a list of committees and their descriptions, see Rule 30 of the House Rules.

Being a State Representative

Great news! You receive \$200 compensation for every term you serve! It's not much, but then again, the low rate tends to keep career politicians out and minimizes the burden on taxpayers. You can also be reimbursed for mileage while driving to and from the State House on legislative business. Lastly, toll booths are free for Representatives.

You must observe certain protocols while in session. A dress code is enforced, which means jacket and tie for men. Most of your time will be spent either in committee (listening to testimony, discussing and voting on recommendations for bills in your committee's domain), or in full session, voting on all bills. By law, all bills must be voted on by the full House, so your vote will always count.

Your fellow Representatives may discuss bills with you, asking your opinion or offering theirs. In general, the environment is low pressure, with a minimum of drama and intrigue. If you treat your colleagues with respect, and make an effort to listen well and find common ground, you will do fine.

You should expect to occasionally be contacted by your constituents, lobbyists, or special interest groups – mostly emails, and occasionally phone calls. You should make every effort to at least respond to your constituents. Except for the occasional high profile bill, the weekly load is small, and not very time consuming.

Party Participation

After you win your party's nomination in the Primary Election, you will want to participate in your party's state convention in October. In addition to electing people to party positions, you will also have a voice in your party's platform.

County Business

Being a State Representative automatically makes you a County Representative in your county. You will be expected to attend two county committee meetings every year, as well as two county legislative business meetings every year. You will also oversee the county budget.

THE NEXT STEP

Now you know how rewarding being a State Representative can be, and that you have what it takes to run for office. The next step is to make the decision to do it!

If you have any questions, or would like assistance getting started, please feel free to contact the following individuals, and we will do our best to help you. You may also contact us to request additional copies of this guide.

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You can find the latest version of this document at the NHLA website:

www.nhliberty.org