

Know Before You Go: NH-02 District Primer

September 2018 • Researched, summarized, and edited by Swing Left's all-volunteer research team!

In the last election, Democrat Annie Kuster won this district by only 15,000 votes (4%). That's too close! With your help, we're going to keep this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

About the Incumbent

Introduction: Democrat Ann "Annie" Kuster has served as NH-02's rep since 2013. This is her third straight term, a first for a Democrat in the seat. Her political efforts represent a unique mix of issues that both conservatives and liberals can get behind. She was born and raised in Concord, NH and graduated from Dartmouth College in 1978. After she earned her law degree from Georgetown University in 1984, she worked as an adoption attorney for 25 years. She and her husband live in Hopkinton, where they raised their two sons.

Issues: Among other planks, Kuster supports leading the fight against the opioid epidemic; helping veterans find jobs; securing retirement benefits for older citizens; protecting small family farms; creating jobs to grow the economy; and making college more affordable for families. She is a staunch defender of a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions.

Committees: Kuster serves on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and the House Agriculture Committee. In 2016, she was the primary sponsor of four bills, two of which addressed mental health awareness and the opioid crisis.

Recent Elections: Kuster has won the district three times, each time by a margin of 5–10%. Kuster's 2016 win was her smallest margin of victory since she defeated Charles Bass in 2012.

Strengths: Kuster's strengths include her three-term experience in the House, her frequent events in the district, her leadership fighting the opioid epidemic in New Hampshire, and her outspoken criticism of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Her strong pro-choice stance is in line with her socially moderate district. Her personal history provides linkage to such key issues as veterans' affairs (her father was a POW in World War II), support of senior citizens (her mother died of Alzheimer's), and campus sexual assault (she is an outspoken survivor).

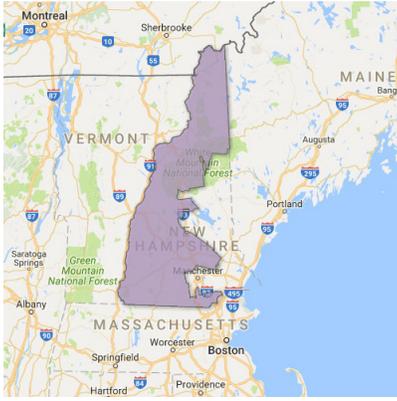
About the Challenger

Introduction: Republican Steve Negrón, a longtime Nashua resident, is a relative newcomer to politics, having begun his political career in 2016 when he won a seat in the NH House. He served in the Air Force for fifteen years, after which he started a defense contracting business. Despite endorsements by several local media outlets in a wide primary field, he captured a little over 25% of the votes in a close three-way finish.

Issues: Negrón campaigned on his unbridled support of Trump and his policies. Negrón strongly supports gun rights, right-to-work (anti-union) policies, and tight border security, including a border wall. His campaign focuses on public safety and supporting small businesses. In the state legislature, he was a strong proponent of "school choice," which diverts funding from public schools.

Strengths: Negrón presents himself as a successful small businessman focused on kitchen-table issues rather than partisanship. His campaign contends that NH's current delegation in DC is not listening to the voters in the state. He's expressed a few moderate views including tepid support of the Affordable Care Act, decreasing defense spending, and lowering the national debt.

Potential Weaknesses: Negrón has very little name recognition and barely won his primary. It will take a lot of work to generate enthusiasm and exposure to this large district. He has very limited political experience and hasn't been the primary sponsor of any legislation during his time in the NH House. He is anti-choice, anti-gun control, and anti-immigration; and he was unhappy this summer when the state voted to ban conversion therapy for LGBTQ children. These positions may alienate moderate voters in NH-02.



NH-02: Facts & Stats

Population Centers

- Nashua, 86,000
- Concord, 43,000 (state capital)
- Keene, 23,000
- Lebanon-Hanover area, 24,000
- Claremont, 13,000
- Berlin, 10,000

2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 175K (49%)
- Trump: 167K (46%)

2016 House Results

- Kuster (D): 174K (50%)
- Lawrence (R): 159K (45%)
- Other: 17K (5%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 189K
- Eligible, not registered: 104K

2014 House Results

- Kuster (D): 131K (55%)
- Garcia (R): 107K (45%)

NH-02: Better Know the District

Geography

NH-02, is large, covering the western part of the state from the Massachusetts line to the Canadian border. Its southern tier extends east as far as Nashua. 52% percent of the population is urban, while 48% is rural. The areas around Manchester, Concord, and Nashua are fairly suburban. Beyond those are scores of small towns, many with populations in the hundreds or low thousands, separated by open space - so organizing/canvassing requires spreading out over large sparsely populated areas.

Citizenry

NH-02, like NH as a whole, is not racially diverse, but it is socioeconomically diverse, with a mixture of white- and blue-collar workers. Because the district spans the entire length of the state, the living experiences and backgrounds of its citizens vary considerably. Many in the southern tier commute to Massachusetts for work and tend to be more fiscally conservative or moderate. Nashua and Concord are more racially diverse, and their residents tend to be more liberal. The southwest from Peterborough to Keene tends to be quite liberal. Up north, the district is much more rural and has more independent-leaning blue-collar workers.

Elections

NH-02 leans Democratic in presidential elections. The Democratic nominee won every election from 2000-2016, though some only narrowly. Hillary Clinton won the district in 2016 with 49% of the vote to Trump's 46%. Recent congressional elections have been mixed. In 1990, Richard Swett broke a 76-year GOP hold on the district's seat. The seat has changed parties four times since: Swett lost to Charles Bass (R) in 1994, who lost to Paul Hodes (D) in 2006. Hodes lost to Bass in 2010, who lost to Kuster two years later.

Higher Education

There are about a dozen small colleges and universities in the district, with Dartmouth College being the most prominent and the largest, with 6,400 students. Keene State is the largest public college, with 5,400. Students are a great voter registration opportunity and possible source of volunteers!

Industries

The manufacture of machinery and electrical and electronic goods, along with precision-instrument and computer-related products, has largely supplanted New Hampshire's textile and garment industry since 1945. Paper and wood products are the next largest industries. Among other service activities that also have grown significantly are insurance, banking, and medical and health care facilities.

Tourism

Next to manufacturing, tourism contributes the greatest proportion to the state economy. Winter sports combined with the fall foliage season and recreational opportunities at the state's numerous state parks, state forests, and lakes and seacoast make New Hampshire a four-season destination.