



Sununu Goes to Washington To Talk To Cato Institute About N.H.

Paula Tracy

January 13, 2022

WASHINGTON – Gov. Chris Sununu laid out some of the work he says the state needs to continue to do to be the best place to live and work in the nation in an interview at the Cato Institute Thursday.

The libertarian think tank in Washington ranked New Hampshire Number One among the states for fiscal, regulatory, and personal policy in 2021. But it has recommendations for improvement.

Entering his fifth year as the state’s chief executive, after recently announcing he plans to run for a fourth term rather than for the U.S. Senate, Sununu, a Republican, said his agenda going forward is to work on existing issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, reduce overdose deaths, increase school choice, pass right-to-work legislation, agree to his version of paid family leave which is “not an income tax” and try to tackle the lack of available housing as the state grows in popularity and prosperity.

While COVID-19 “is still very much with us,” and on his front burner, Sununu said he would resist government mandates over the choice of businesses and hospitals to decide whether mandatory vaccinations among employees and mask-wearing among visitors and patrons was necessary.

In much the way he said local control has been the hallmark of the state’s success, he said individual choice over government mandates always work out better saying those approaches are eventually “doomed to fail.”

He criticized teachers’ unions in general saying they are “out for themselves.”

“I try not to be a union basher,” Sununu said but he called their approach a “failing model.”

Sununu said he embraces school choice now and going forward particularly for low-income families who find that their public school is not working for them, and he noted the popular voucher approach the state has taken for that demographic.

InDepthNH.org reached out to both the NEA-NH and the New Hampshire Democratic Party for a response to the interview that was livestreamed but did not immediately receive a response from NEA-NH.

NHDP Chair Ray Buckley said: “Instead of attacking New Hampshire teachers and pushing a costly school voucher program that will gut public education, Chris Sununu ought to be doing his job and working to fund public education for all students in New Hampshire.”

“Chris Sununu and the NH GOP need to end their obsessive culture war on U.S. history that’s hurting Granite State children, and let teachers teach,” said Buckley.

Sununu traveled to Washington D.C. for the policy conversation with William Ruger, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, and Jason Sorens, an adjunct scholar there, and the director of the Center for Ethics in Society at Saint Anselm College.

The conversation was virtual and was watched by many with three questions taken at the end of the hour from the public in a chatbox.

Both Ruger and Sorens are authors of *Freedom in the 50 States*, its sixth edition which is an index of personal and economic freedom in America by states during 2021.

In 2020, Florida was ranked the number one state on the basis of how their policies promote freedom in the fiscal, regulatory and personal realms but in 2021, New Hampshire returned to the number one position with Florida second, Nevada third, Tennessee fourth, and South Dakota fifth.

The 50th or the worst-ranked state according to the Cato index was New York while neighboring states Massachusetts ranked 30th, Vermont 43rd, and Maine 43th.

Sununu said the top five states on the list produced by the report are where “people flock to.” The report indicates that due to the pro-freedom direction of New Hampshire and its legislative policies it is likely to be harder for other states to “regain the crown” next year.

New Hampshire’s 400-member House of Representatives, considered by Sununu to be the most representative in the nation, flipped from Democratic to Republican control a year ago with more than 100 endorsed Freedom Caucus candidates being elected. They are all up for re-election this year.

Sununu called it an honor to be considered the number one state for freedom and said “who you elect matters.”

Sununu said he was fearful that the next generation is shying away from politics because it has become so divisive and personal but he urged those in states which don’t have the freedoms that New Hampshire enjoys to run for office or get civically engaged as the best way to make a difference and see change.

“Stay positive,” he said. “You need hope.”

He gave an example of success in that regard as the town of Walpole which built affordable housing which looks like a barn and in character with the community.

He said the state needs to engage the business community and entice and empower them to be part of the housing solution as a way to fight against the “NIMBY” or not in my backyard philosophy obstructing housing development.

He also pointed to his efforts to reduce taxes as part of the reason the state is doing so well noting that he reminds his father John, a former governor, that he was not able to do what he has done.

The report had some concerns for New Hampshire from its freedom-loving perspective.

It said New Hampshire’s regulatory outlook is not so sunny and noted: “the granite state’s primary sin is exclusionary zoning.”

It recommended that the state needs to legalize gambling, pass a right-to-work law and that local governments need to get a handle on school spending and taxation.

Sununu was asked by a caller about legalizing marijuana and said the state has decriminalized it under his watch and he would be receptive to bills that would handle it in the right way, but he worried about the state’s drug problems and does not want to exacerbate or diminish advances to turn that crisis around.

Sununu said the bottom line for freedom in New Hampshire is that local control means individuals have more of a say. That brings with it an inherent sense of freedom from government and the ability to engage at a micro level to come to a consensus and see meaningful change and feel that individual voices are heard, which is not a top-down government at all but by the people and for the people, he said.

A copy of the CATO report can be found here <https://www.freedominthe50states.org/>