Highlights from Tuesday’s Student Body President and Vice President Debate

Voting occurs this Thursday, March 28, from 12 a.m. to 11:59 p.m.

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What are Durham pedestrians, drivers and hall residents to do about e-scooters zooming down paths and hallways? Should students be financially compensated via honoraria for volunteer leadership positions? Free laundry or Netflix?

These were just some of the hot-button questions posed to presidential and board representative candidates during the debate held by the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Student Senate on Tuesday, March 26 at 6 p.m. in the Memorial Union Building’s (MUB) Strafford Room. The debate was held in preparation for the UNH general student election on Thursday, March 28, and centered around the ballot’s new referendum questions. While both tickets believed free laundry was more important than free streaming, their perspectives diverged on some issues such as housing and honorarium.

“There’s a lot of really big concerns this year with the budget crisis going on. Voting for student body president is so important because they are the voice...the image [of the student body], and they meet with so many UNH administrators,” said debate attendee Shannon Tagliaferri, a fourth-year student. “You want to have someone that you know is going to advocate for you.”

Meet the Candidates

Ticket one of the ballot includes Lily Butcher, a third-year pre-dental major and presidential candidate, and Josh Lopresti, a first-year political science major and vice-presidential candidate. Butcher and Lopresti are both transfer students who have expressed their mission to build authenticity, unity and tenacity in the UNH community. If elected, they strive to publish a newsletter informing the UNH community about important happenings across campus. The Instagram for the Butcher-Lopresti campaign can be found here.

“I transferred here [to UNH] last spring and as a transfer student, I really struggled in finding my community and just being happy here. I made it my mission here to find friends, so I joined pre-dental society...it can be really hard to settle in somewhere new, especially on a campus this large,” said Butcher. She expressed that her ticket’s platform is building community within student organizations to help students find their place at UNH.
The main focus of the Butcher-Lopresti campaign is to bring financial support back to student organizations.

“We talked to a lot of the clubs, and sports teams [about] their funding being wiped,” said Butcher. “We assured them that we want to help bring financial support back to them by collecting student feedback showing there is interest...showing how important student orgs really are...to continue running smoother than they already do. We understand that... they are under their own student governing body, but by supporting them all students will be supported.”

Ticket two of the ballot includes Christian Katumba, a third-year economics and ecogastronomy major and an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The vice president candidate of ticket two is second-year student, Rachel Rowley, who is studying philosophy on a pre-law track. The main missions of the Katumba-Rowley campaign are to promote student involvement between the senate and student body and to uplift student organizations to promote activity and community. The Instagram for the Katumba-Rowley campaign can be found here.

Katumba and Rowley expressed their goal to make a website that mimics the anonymous discussion thread application YikYak, focused on obtaining feedback from the student body in a constructive way.

“With our own touch we can connect the university online and make it accessible,” said Rowley.

Where Candidates Stand on Housing

Housing has been an issue for some UNH students in the wake of the on-campus housing requirement being established this past academic year, which requires new undergraduate students to live on campus for their first four semesters.

“Moving forward past the first year really limits a lot of people to staying on campus when it could be cheaper [to live off campus],” said Lopresti.

However, the on-campus housing requirement can benefit those with no other option than to live on campus.

“Being an international student, housing is not something I could find easily. Having the two years [of mandatory on-campus housing] does help people in my situation that do not live close to campus...I also do realize that the housing market in Durham is very complicated to deal with. So having that option for students who do not have the means to live off campus is something we should keep in mind,” said Katumba. He suggested that extending vacation housing for those who need it should also be considered.

Candidates’ Thoughts on E-Scooters

E-scooters have been a controversial topic on the UNH campus in recent months, as detailed in previous reporting by The New Hampshire. One of the questions on the 2024 ballot asks if e-scooters and similar electric mobility devices should be prohibited from on-campus paths and walkways. Both tickets expressed their support for prohibiting and regulating these vehicles on campus.

“I personally do not like electric scooters, I have almost been hit around six times a week. I think that UNH has struggled in the past with road safety already...now adding motorized vehicles there is an obstacle that we need to overcome,” said Rowley. “I think introducing more safety regulations such as bike lanes...reinforcing lighting on campus, and pedestrian crossing signs could help UNH’s road safety regulations and make this a better campus for everyone.”

The Future of Honoraria

UNH honorarium is a non-negotiated amount of money given to members of official student organizations in leadership positions as a symbol of respect and appreciation for the work they have done in their role. Those against honorariums may believe that the $54,000 used to fund them should go to event programming instead of individual students.
Lopresti stated that he does not believe honoraria should be awarded to individual students.

“It’s a volunteer position. We're [student leaders] here to serve people on a volunteer basis and we're not doing it for money at all,” he said.

However, those in support of honoraria may believe that it provides some financial relief to student leaders who are challenged by the demands of their roles to balance school and work life, according to Katumba.

“Personally, I do believe that honoraria should be given in the form of cash because recognizing the students..the work that the students are putting into what they're doing for the university is important,” said Katumba.

Voting for the 2024 general election will take place online Thursday, March 28 from 12 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. The elected president and vice president of the UNH student body will serve until the spring of 2025.

More information detailing candidate bios, the pros and cons of the referendum questions and the link to vote can be found here.