

From the Classroom to the State House

Carsey School students run for New Hampshire legislature

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MPP STUDENTS WILLIS GRIFFITH (LEFT) AND JOE ALEXANDER (RIGHT) ARE CANDIDATES FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE'S HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Running for political office is a challenging endeavor under any circumstance, but it is especially impressive to do so while working on a master's degree. Two [Carsey School of Public Policy Master in Public Policy \(MPP\)](#) students, Joe Alexander (Republican) and Willis Griffith (Democrat), have successfully won their respective primaries and are currently running for seats in New Hampshire's House of Representatives. Both students say

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the experience has been challenging and rewarding. “Starting a full-time graduate program within three weeks of the Republican primary was certainly stressful,” says Alexander. “On top of the MPP work load, I spent countless hours knocking on doors.”

Adds Griffith, “The challenge has been time management and balance, but it is all exciting work that I am passionate about, which makes it easy to keep going.”

New Hampshire’s 400-person state legislature has an average age of well over 60, which as of 2015 was the [oldest in the nation](#). Despite this, Alexander, 23, and Griffith, 24, are bucking that trend. Alexander was inspired to run for office “to keep Goffstown a town for young families and retired seniors by keeping taxes low,” and hopes to bring new perspectives to his colleagues in the House. Griffith’s inspiration stemmed in part from his participation in the Carsey School’s Master in Public Policy [Washington D.C. Colloquium](#), which ignited his desire to create more connections between legislators and those they represent.

Though they are running from opposite sides of the aisle, both Alexander and Griffith understand the critical importance of civic engagement. “The current state of our country is testing our democracy and demands civic involvement. Such engagement leads to dialogue and will, in turn, help remedy the existing lack of cooperation and polarization of ideas,” says Griffith.

For Alexander, the importance of each vote became clear to him during the New Hampshire primaries when just a handful of engaged individuals put him on the November ballot. “Forty-one votes separated me from winning and losing the Republican primary. Voting is one of the most patriotic activities a citizen can participate in, and it takes just five minutes,” says Alexander.

Griffith and Alexander credit their MPP education as a benefit in their

“The MPP program
has given me a

campaigns and are confident it will help them serve as effective representatives of their communities. “The MPP program has given me a strong policy foundation that I have been able to apply to campaign strategy, policy platforms and political conversation,” says Griffith.

Similarly, Alexander says, “A lot of the readings I am doing in class are real-life issues in the New Hampshire House. This kind of information gives me knowledge in New Hampshire policy that will allow me to contribute in committees.”

Asked what advice they might have for others who are interested in participating in civic institutions or running for office, both candidates have a unified message: show up.

“Don’t wait for the right time, make the opportunity for yourself,” says Griffith.

“Go to town meetings, budget sessions and New Hampshire House sessions. The only way to get involved is to show up and see how things function,” says Alexander.

Learn more about the Carsey School of Public Policy's Master in Public Policy.

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