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BUCKLEY: When you're running for president in New Hampshire, you should be thinking that you're running for school board in your hometown, because it is about personal relationships and conversations.

I'm Ray Buckley, and I am the chair of the New Hampshire Democratic Party.

MCKENNA: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. My name is Chris McKenna, and I'm one of the producers of Brookings podcasts.

I'm here today to share my experience from a recent trip to New Hampshire I took with Elaine Kamarck, a Brookings senior fellow and expert on elections and presidential politics. You probably already know that New Hampshire receives a lot of attention this time of year for the role it plays in the primary process. It's the first state to hold a primary, and the second state to hold a nominating contest after Iowa. And for those reasons, the Granite Staters don't have to look hard to find a presidential candidate or their campaigns this time of year.

Elaine is an expert on how parties nominate their presidential candidates. She's actually written a book on the process, "Primary Politics: Everything you need to know about how America nominates its presidential candidates." She's also worked on several campaigns herself, so she's the perfect person to travel with for the primaries.

She and I were in New Hampshire in mid-January, and while we were there we went to rallies, marches, and spoke to some of the people who really live the first in the nation primary.

You'll hear some of those interviews today, including from Ray Buckley, Chair of the New Hampshire Democratic Party, who opened this episode, and you'll also hear directly from Elaine, who is joining me in the Brookings podcast studio.

I want to emphasize that the Brookings is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. While you'll hear directly from Democratic Party operatives and one Republican presidential candidate, Brookings does not endorse candidates or political parties.

What we hope to share with you is a sense of what it's like to be on the ground in New Hampshire in the days leading up to the primary, and to share some insights from the key players in the state on how they do their jobs and the role New Hampshire plays in American politics. This is not endorsement, but instead we hope you find it educational.

And now, on with the show. Elaine, welcome to the studio, it's good to see you again.

KAMARCK: Chris, good to see you again.

MCKENNA: Elaine, I should mention that Fred Dews told me this is actually the 300th episode of the Brookings Cafeteria podcast, and that you are the most-interviewed guest on the show!

KAMARCK: Well, I think that's terrific on both counts.

MCKENNA: Before we focus on New Hampshire, I think we should address the results of the Iowa caucus that happened this week -- actually, last night at the time of this recording. So could you tell us a little bit about what happened -- what we know from the results and what that might mean moving forward?

KAMARCK: Well, I fully expected when we scheduled this podcast that we would start by recapping the events in Iowa. But I thought we would start by recapping who won in Iowa. And instead, we still don't know who won in Iowa, because last night they had basically a systems breakdown. The computer app that was supposed to report the results had basically one of those meltdowns, which those of us in the computer age are getting used to, and didn't work, nor did the telephone lines that were put in as a failsafe. They were all overcrowded.

So at about midnight last night, the Iowa Democratic Party said, well, we're going to need another day to get these results in. I just wrote a short piece for that on the Brookings website, which you can find under my name, which explains some of the technicalities of the things that went wrong in Iowa. But the bottom line is that here we are looking forward to the New Hampshire primary and we don't know who won in Iowa.

MCKENNA: That's great and a perfect segue into the main part of our conversation today – New Hampshire. To get started, New Hampshire faces a lot of criticism for its first in the nation primary spot. Could you give us a little bit of background on why one of the smallest states in the country with one of the country's smallest non-Hispanic white populations has the first primary?

KAMARCK: Well, mostly it's history and it's a very interesting history. They've had the first primary all the way since the 1920s. But for many years, they didn't put the names of the presidential candidates on the primary ballot. There was just the list of people who wanted to go to the Democratic or the Republican conventions.

Then in 1949, they had a secretary of state who got the bright idea of putting the presidential candidates' names on the ballot, as well as the delegate candidate names. And that kind of catapulted New Hampshire into one of those places where the country looked to, to see who was kind of attractive to voters, who were the early favorites. It was not meaningful in the sense that it bound delegates. And yet for the party bosses and the activists around the country who were trying to decide which of these people should be their party's standard bearer, results from New Hampshire were definitely taken into account.

MCKENNA: Right, and today it's still one of the smallest states in the country, giving one of the fewest amount of delegates to the person who wins the state. So why is it still

important?

KAMARCK: Well, because it's first, and being first in a sequence is really important. And I think that what people miss when they ask the question, why is New Hampshire important, is they miss the fact that the nominating process in both parties is unlike any other election in America, because it's not one election. It is a sequence of elections that begins in February, goes all the way till June and then culminates in the national convention. So any time you have a sequence, being first is really important because it has an impact on those voters that come after you.

MCKENNA: So this year, the crowded Democratic field is certainly the story to watch, and that's why we decided to start by stopping by the New Hampshire Democratic Party's office in Concord to meet with the party chair, Ray Buckley.

BUCKLEY: It's one of the first things I'd say when inevitably somebody stops by and says they are thinking about running for president. I say congratulations for being elected U.S. senator in your state or governor or whatever post that you've held, but when you're running for president in New Hampshire, you should be thinking that you're running for school board in your hometown because it is about personal relationships and conversations.

I think that one of the things that really separate us is that, at 11 years old, I was interviewing president candidates to see who I would support.

MCKENNA: As you can tell, Buckley has been doing this for a long time, and he has seen a lot of people's careers grow and develop.

BUCKLEY: Nearly everybody in New Hampshire politics, their very first experience was one presidential campaign or another. The attraction of the candidates and the excitement that comes with being the first in the nation really brings in a new generation every four years.

And that's just phenomenal.

MCKENNA: He even shared a bit of his own personal story working on the Carter campaign as a 15-year-old.

BUCKLEY: I spent the entire month of July of 1975 building up for a house party here in Concord. And they called me up the night before and they said, "Oh, would you like to ride with Governor Carter to the event since you worked so hard on this event?" Oh, you know, I'm 15 so it's like, "sure!" So we get there and there are three people.

But when I tell the campaign workers, it's like there were three people and it's the first weekend of August 1975. He went on to win New Hampshire, win the nomination, become president a year and a half later.

MCKENNA: It's easy to meet candidates in New Hampshire, and these house parties are a large part of the reason why.

Someone with a lot of experience organizing those parties is Larry Drake, and we were able to speak to him in his home in Rockingham County.

DRAKE: I'm Larry Drake and I'm the chairperson of the Rockingham County Democratic Committee.

As the county chair, I'm in touch with the candidates or their staff. When they come through, they will reach out to me. It's usually their staff, and our county committee has hosted a number of the candidates for what we call meet-and-greets. Which is basically the candidate speaks for maybe 20 minutes and then they answer questions and we might have some refreshments – it's pretty informal. So I'm very interested in that. And I try to arrange meet and greets or similar things so Democrats can meet the candidates. And it's a way for hopefully people to get involved themselves, to become active Democrats.

And so I'm always hoping that when people come out to see a candidate, that they'll get active if they aren't already active or they'll stay active. And so a lot of my work, just regular work as a county chair, is to build up the committees in the different towns.

MCKENNA: Drake also got involved in politics at a young age, and he's been involved ever since.

DRAKE: Well I've been interested in politics ever since 1968, when I was a junior in high school in northern New Jersey, and I went to an anti-Vietnam War rally in New York City in April of 1968. And I've been active in politics of one sort or another for all those years.

I was active in my union, the American Federation of Government Employees, for many years when I worked at the Department of Labor. And so I'd always voted Democratic, but I was not involved with the party. So Joan and I moved to Portsmouth in September of 2006, and we got involved very quickly with the campaign of Carol Shea Porter, who was running for Congress for the first time. So I got involved in her campaign and she won. That was a huge Democratic victory in 2000. Especially in New Hampshire. We won an amazing victory.

So I got involved in 2007 with the Rockingham County Democratic Committee because we knew the chair person, Lenore Patton, and started attending meetings. And I moved over the years. I became the treasurer and vice chair. And then in 2012, I was elected the chair and I've been chair ever since. And I enjoy it.

MCKENNA: Drake doesn't personally make endorsements in primaries, which other county and town chairs do. But you can imagine he's someone campaigns would like on their side.

DRAKE: Well, I'm sure that they would like my endorsement, but I made a decision several years ago that I would not make any endorsements in any Democratic primary. So I'm on

it. I think I can be a more effective chair if I'm neutral, because I've noticed that if you endorse somebody, then people that are supporting other candidates may be a little suspicious. They're like, "are you rigging things to help your candidate?" So I decided, hey, I'm not going to endorse anybody. I'm all about building the party and getting ready for the general election. So I'll be I'll just be supportive of all the candidates. And, you know, whoever wins, wins. And you know what? It makes it easier to get along with everybody because I'm not opposing anybody.

MCKENNA: So Elaine, are these endorsements from town and county chairs important?

KAMARCK: Oh, absolutely. In general, in elections for president endorsements don't matter very much, you know, when you're talking about the November election. But because New Hampshire is a retail politics state, endorsements from people who are active in their communities and have a lot of friends and neighbors in their communities are critically important. So, of course, the first thing that presidential candidates do is they look up the county chairs and the town chairs, they look up precinct activists, they look up people who've worked in other presidential campaigns, and then try to convince them to get on their side.

Maybe the most famous person who ever did this was current Senator Jeanne Shaheen. Jeanne Shaheen worked for Senator Gary Hart way back in 1984 when he won a surprise victory over Vice President Walter Mondale in New Hampshire. And having Jeanne Shaheen on Gary Hart's side was something that those of us who were in the Mondale campaign, and I was in the Mondale campaign then, were very jealous of and for good reason. Jeanne Shaheen knew how to introduce Gary Hart to New Hampshire. And even though he didn't win the nomination of the Democratic Party in 1984, he sure did give Walter Mondale a run for his money.

MCKENNA: Now we heard from Larry Drake and Ray Buckley about the deep passion for retail politics in New Hampshire, which Buckley has been involved in since he was a

teenager. I imagine that the same kind of commitment exists on the Republican side, right?

KAMARCK: Oh, absolutely. The Republican voters, the Republican activists in New Hampshire, are every bit as committed to A, their political party and B, to keeping New Hampshire first in the nation. This is one of the reasons that New Hampshire's had so much success. Remaining first in the nation is that it is a bipartisan obsession. Democrats and Republicans like their first in the nation status.

Also, they like the chance to meet Republican candidates and future presidents. There are lots of people like Ray Buckley who remember meeting Jimmy Carter, and there are Republicans who can remember meeting Ronald Reagan and George Bush, both George Bush's, as they came through New Hampshire. So New Hampshire is a very, very political state for both political parties.

MCKENNA: Beyond house parties and diners, there are plenty of other public events in New Hampshire that draw crowds and candidates.

Between speaking with Ray Buckley and Larry Drake, we went over to the Women's March which happened to be going on that weekend. We stopped by to see the rally and some of the campaign organizers and volunteers who were speaking with members of the crowd.

On the way, we bumped into Chasten Buttigieg, husband of the presidential candidate and former Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Pete Buttigieg.

We also met up with former Massachusetts Governor Bill Weld, who is running for the presidential nomination in the Republican primary.

WELD: The existence of the first in the nation New Hampshire primary is one of the things that gives me hope that there's a shot here because you have to pass through this window before we get into the other side, and you have to stop and shake hands on your way. You can't

just parachute in here and you can't buy this primary. So for an underdog like myself, that's a very significant aspect of the whole fight.

MCKENNA: Governor Weld acknowledged that he's an underdog against President Trump. But, as he explains, incumbent presidents have been challenged in New Hampshire before.

WELD: President Carter was challenged by Ted Kennedy in the primary and lost the election in a landslide to Reagan. And Gerald Ford himself was challenged by Reagan and then lost the final to Carter.

And then the most relevant for my purposes was George H.W. Bush. George Bush 43, who was at the height of his powers in December 1991, a month and a half before the New Hampshire primary -- and Pat Buchanan, who is nothing but a conservative commentator, never held office, came in and got 37 percent of the vote. So Bush beat him 63 to 37. But that so exceeded expectations that Mr. Bush, who is a fine president, really never recovered. And he had been at 91 percent favorability both parties in December of 1990. And he never recovered from the February 1992 primary in New Hampshire, which he won handily. But it wasn't good enough.

MCKENNA: So Elaine, Governor Weld mentions three cases in which the incumbent president was challenged in the primaries, and then went on to lose in the general election. What do you make of that history?

KAMARCK: Well, I think you now understand why New Hampshire is so important. In the three instances that Governor Weld articulated, they were a surprise indication of the weakness of those incumbent presidents. I would add a fourth one there, which is very dramatic.

Lyndon Johnson ran in the New Hampshire primary in 1968. While he came in first. He

got a tough challenge from Senator Eugene McCarthy, who was running as an anti-war candidate. The fact that Johnson won, but did not win by an overwhelming margin, meant that Johnson was in fact going to face political trouble in the general election. And rather than go through the season fighting Senator McCarthy and eventually Senator Bobby Kennedy, Johnson got out of the race after the New Hampshire primary. He got out of the race for president, allegedly to concentrate on making peace in Vietnam.

But clearly, what New Hampshire showed was he was vulnerable. And so New Hampshire's had a very powerful role in many of these races, even when an incumbent president is involved.

MCKENNA: Governor Weld also mentioned that New Hampshire is an open primary state and what implications that has. Could you provide a little bit more context as to what an open primary vs. closed primary state is, and why it matters?

KAMARCK: Well, there are very few states left in the United States that require you to register with a political party. In those states you can't decide, say, a couple days before Election Day just to go in and vote in the primary of the opposite party. You have to register with a political party. Now, New Hampshire, like many other states, makes it easy for you to switch around. So in New Hampshire, if you decide a week beforehand that really you're more interested in the Democratic race than the Republican race, or if there's, as there is this year, a Democratic race, but no real Republican race, you can decide to vote in whatever primary you want to vote in. You just have to go in. You have to sign up as a Democrat, at least for a day, and vote in that primary.

What that means is that there is a more open and fluid electorate in the primaries. It's not just people who signed up initially as Democrats or as Republicans. Independents can kind of

wander in and out of these primaries. And that adds an element of uncertainty to every New Hampshire primary.

MCKENNA: Here's how that's influenced the way the Governor Weld campaigns.

WELD: My wife and I have been campaigning together quite a while and we offer to give soap parties for Democrats, even liberal Democrats, who would be willing to just change their registration to Undeclared for a day. Come on in and vote for me in the Republican primary and it's a vote against Mr. Trump, so they have to keep that in mind. Directly against Mr. Trump. And then go back and take a long, hot shower with lots of soap. So we're going to have hundreds of bars of L'Occitane soap to give away. And we've got pretty good traction with that with the Democrats in New Hampshire and in Vermont. They don't even need to reregister because anybody can take a Republican ballot.

MCKENNA: Now Elaine, I'd like to turn to some of the nuts and bolts of campaigning in New Hampshire -- and what we should anticipate as election day draws nearer.

It's a small state as we noted, but I imagine huge sums of money are spent on campaigns there for advertising and organizing on the ground. Can you give listeners a sense of the scale on spending on primary campaigns?

KAMARCK: Well, it's enormous, the amount of money spent in New Hampshire, and several things drive that. First of all, New Hampshire is close to Boston and it shares Boston's media market. And Boston is a very expensive media market because really it covers not just Massachusetts, but it covers many of the New England states. So the first big expense in New Hampshire is, in fact, television and radio out of Boston.

The second big expense is that unlike in other states where you can campaign from a TV studio, in New Hampshire you actually need people on the ground. New Hampshire voters

expect to meet the presidential candidates and be able to talk with them. And to do that, you need an operation on the ground that knows who the voters are and knows who the activists are. So all of that costs money. City offices costs money, paying organizers, even though mostly they're fairly young people who don't cost too much.

All of these things cost money. And the Boston media market costs a lot of money. And that's why for a small state, a huge economic investment is made in the state every four years. And I'm not even counting all the reporters and television crews who come up to New Hampshire on a regular basis and spend their expense accounts at New Hampshire's hotels and in New Hampshire's restaurants. So that's another economic benefit to the state.

MCKENNA: Another point of personal interest for me was how the election evolved over time, this year in particular with the crowded field. How it changed from a crowded field in the fall, to a thinner – but still pretty busy – campaign today. And that's something Larry Drake spoke to directly.

DRAKE: So what we're going to see between now and February 11th, which is when the primary is the serious campaigns will be bringing in their GOTV directors. We're supposed to house somebody here for one of the campaigns.

And then you get your volunteers from other states coming up. I mean, you know, Elizabeth Warren, of course, has a lot of people from Massachusetts. And the closer we get to the primary, especially after Iowa, all sorts of people will be pouring into the state. It's great! I mean, I love it. It's, it's wonderful.

MCKENNA: Governor Weld mentioned that he enjoys — or rather prefers — a long campaign season.

WELD: You know, the typical voter in New Hampshire doesn't really feel that she or he

has met a presidential candidate until they've shaken his or her hand three times. It's not just seeing in a crowd. And that's awfully good. You know, I'm one who thinks that long campaign seasons are good because they rub rough edges off of people and they also prevent somebody from suddenly becoming modish and the flavor of the month.

MCKENNA: Governor Weld also shared this when we asked about how he was meeting people on the campaign trail.

WELD: You meet people in New Hampshire – it's a local tradition here – in diners. And you can go three highly populated diners and shake two hundred fifty hands in an hour and ten minutes, and that's almost as good as a parade. You really get a sense for what people are thinking.

MCKENNA: And Ray Buckley, Chair of the Democratic Party in New Hampshire, spoke to how New Hampshire has been working with the other early primary states in advance of their contests. Note that he spoke to us before the delegate slating caucuses that took place on January 25th.

BUCKLEY: Well, part of the process is that we have our siblings of Iowa and Nevada and South Carolina. So we are in constant communication with the other three state parties. We've gone down to South Carolina in November. I went out to the Iowa dinner in late October.

And we'll be heading out to Nevada to help out with the caucuses. We very much understand that all four of us are together. So we do spend a lot of time working together with that.

So we had our convention in September with nine thousand people and all the candidates. We then had our Eleanor Roosevelt dinner with five hundred people showed up -- a lot more than we expected. So we weren't really prepared for that.

And then we had our city elections and we are now organizing the delegate selection process. We have our delegate slating caucuses that will be happening on Saturday, the 25th. And then that from the moment Iowa is declared, whoever is the winner, it's showtime for us.

MCKENNA: And this leads in part to a question of these famous “independents” of New Hampshire who will help decide the campaign in the closing days.

BUCKLEY: What I've always been told is that one third of them are really Democrats who just don't want to say they're Democrats. One third are Republicans who just don't want to say they are Republicans. Then there's that one third in the middle that don't pay any attention to politics and are completely fickle.

They decide at the last minute, and they decide the elections. They are the singular most important voting bloc in the state of New Hampshire because we have very close primaries. We have very close statewide elections, local elections. They are the individuals that control the state of New Hampshire.

MCKENNA: And when we asked Larry Drake what it takes to win hearts and votes in New Hampshire, he quoted a famous aphorism.

DRAKE: I just think that to win it, the candidate has got to appeal to the person that they're the person that they want and they could win. Although the saying is, “Democrats fall in love, Republicans fall in line.”

KAMARCK: You know, that really is true or that has seemed to be true in the past. I'm not quite sure it held for 2016 because I think Republicans kind of fell in love with Trump, even though their party leaders were not so crazy about Donald Trump at the time. In fact, many of them even skipped the Cleveland convention. But basically, yes, Democrats fall in love. Republicans fall in line.

The real question this time around is, given the Democrats intense desire to beat Donald Trump, will they fall in line behind somebody that maybe isn't their first choice, but maybe who they think they should support because they have the best chance of beating Donald Trump? And that I think we'll see in a week or so.

MCKENNA: Well I won't ask you to make any predictions, but when we're interpreting the results of New Hampshire, what will you be looking for?

And if I could add on to that, will it be important that two of the candidates – Senator Warren and Senator Sanders -- are from neighboring states?

KAMARCK: First of all, one of the things that happens in New Hampshire often is that the winner is not always the winner. And in fact, in my book, I often put winner in quotation marks, because a lot of times in New Hampshire and also in Iowa, it's the winner of the expectations game.

Maybe the most famous example was 1992, when Governor Bill Clinton had a very, very rough month leading up to the New Hampshire primary. There were rumors about his affairs, that how he got out of the draft during Vietnam. He was really having a bad month. He managed to come in second in Iowa, which was kind of surprising to a lot of people who'd written him off. And through some skillful spinning of the news, he declared himself the "Comeback Kid." And frankly, the rest is history. After New Hampshire, Bill Clinton went on to win a series of primaries. So the question in New Hampshire is always expectations.

Now, for senators or governors from neighboring states -- and Senator Sanders is from Vermont and Senator Warren is from Massachusetts -- the expectations are always a little bit higher than they are for presidential candidates from other parts of the country. And part of that is because these neighboring states, as I said before, share the Boston media market. So Elizabeth

Warren is well-known to people in New Hampshire, as is Bernie Sanders. And so there's a little bit of a higher expectation if you come from a neighboring state.

MCKENNA: And then after New Hampshire? What are some of the important elements of the nomination process we should be paying attention to?

KAMARCK: Well, after New Hampshire, we have two other small retail states. We have Nevada and we have South Carolina. And that will round out the month of February. The big show comes early in March with Super Tuesday. And at that point, an interesting transition takes place. Instead of looking at who won individual states, we will look at something called the delegate count. We'll look at who is winning in hundreds of congressional districts across the country and who has the most delegates.

So, I would say that by mid-March, maybe St. Patrick's Day, we'll have a pretty good idea of what the Democratic race looks like, whether we have a front runner, or whether we are down to a two-person or even multi-person race. But in March, things change pretty significantly.

MCKENNA: Well, Elaine, thanks again for letting me join you in New Hampshire, and also spending some more time with us today in the studio.

KAMARCK: Thanks. Happy to be here.

MCKENNA: You can learn more about the primary process in depth from Elaine's own book, published by the Brookings Institution Press and now in its third edition, titled *Primary Politics*. Look for it on our website.

Now I want to close this episode with an exchange between Elaine and Ray Buckley in which she noted that New Hampshire is known for its surprises.

BUCKLEY: Yes. And we're going to have one this year.

KAMARCK: Okay! You want to tell us what?

BUCKLEY: Nobody knows what it is. That's why it's going to be a surprise.

With Iowa and New Hampshire, 100 percent up for grabs. There are at this point at least four candidates that could win Iowa, and those candidates could also win New Hampshire. History's being thrown out the window every day nowadays. It's not like 20 years ago, when we say, "oh, well, this is the pattern and this will continue."

But so far, anyone who has won Iowa and New Hampshire has been the nominee of either the Democratic or Republican Party. So history would say that if somebody is able to pull off winning both Iowa and New Hampshire, any one of them, whether it's Elizabeth, Bernie, Buttigieg, Biden, or Klobuchar, that they would be well on their way to the nomination.

But I don't know. I mean, this is such a changing time in politics. The way we communicate, how people are influenced is so different. So it makes this ridiculously exciting.

MCKENNA: The Brookings Cafeteria is the product of an amazing team of colleagues.

Gaston Reboredo is the audio engineer, and Amelia Haymes is our audio intern. They helped record my conversation with Elaine and edited the audio you heard for this episode.

Fred Dews, host of the Brookings Cafeteria, produced this episode.

My thanks to Elaine Kamarck for letting me travel to New Hampshire with her, and for interviewing Larry Drake, Ray Buckley, and Bill Weld. And thank you to those three gentlemen for spending time with us during a very busy time for them.

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Thanks again for listening. I'm Chris McKenna.