

Nate Boudreau is in **Gardner**.

In August I wrote you an open letter. I said this campaign stopped being about me the day there was no Republican name on the ballot. I meant it then. I mean it now, because the write-in came up short, and what I'm about to say only makes sense if you believed me the first time.

First, the numbers, because you deserve them straight. The law required 150 valid write-in votes. Across Ashburnham, Templeton, and Winchendon, 23 of you wrote my name. Gardner recorded 104 write-in votes for this office. Even a perfect count puts the ceiling at 127. I fell short, and I own that the way I've owned everything in this campaign.

But here's what those numbers don't show. People wrote me in everywhere. On the wrong line. For the wrong office. My name appeared more than twenty times on ballots for Congress in one town alone — and not just on Republican ballots. Democrats wrote me in too.

Think about that: in a year this divided, neighbors from both parties picked up a pen and wrote the same name. Some wrote “Nate.” Some got the name right and missed the oval. Some filled the oval and forgot the address the statute demands. Every one of them was a neighbor who stood in a booth on the Tuesday before Labor Day and tried to send me to Beacon Hill, and the mechanism said their voice didn't count.

Let me be unmistakably clear about two things. I am not contesting this result, and I'm not alleging misconduct by anyone. The clerks and poll workers of these four towns did their jobs honestly and by the book. The book is the problem. When the law makes a citizen hand-letter a name and address into a quarter-inch box, fill an oval, and forfeits their vote over penmanship and placement, that's not election security. That's a barrier. Fixing it is on my list now, whether I ever hold office or not.

To everyone who carried a sticker, spelled it right, spelled it wrong, wrote me in for State Representative or for Congress, on a Republican ballot or a Democratic one, with a hand that shook: thank you. You did nothing wrong. You are the reason none of this was wasted.

Now, November.

I spent the August letter making one argument: that this district deserves serious representation, and that candidates don't simply appear. They spend decades learning this work. They balance budgets. They sit through the meetings nobody attends. They earn trust one vote at a time. That was never an argument for electing anyone who grabs the label. It was an argument for electing serious people.

So let me be serious with you now: this November, I'm voting for

[Michael J. Nicholson](#)

Mike and I ran against each other, and in five months I never said a word against his character, because there wasn't one to say. I've watched him serve every part of this community, including the parts that will never vote for him. I've

watched him take abuse that would break most people and answer it with grace. There's a moment I keep coming back to: a man who slanders him almost daily laid hands on him in anger, and Mike's response was "I will pray for you." Fifteen years in public life, and I know how rare that is.

Between Jon Zlotnik, Mike, and myself, there are almost 40 years of service to these four towns. Budgets, plow routes, school formulas, two-in-the-morning phone calls. I disagree with Mike on plenty, I ran because I do, and when he's on Beacon Hill I'll keep saying so. But the disagreements of serious people are how this district gets served. There is no Republican on the November ballot. What remains opposite Mike is someone claiming the conservative lane without ever doing the work that earns it, and I've watched what travels with that campaign. Fiscal discipline is a conservative value. Local control is a conservative value. Bigotry is not, and hatred wearing our clothes is still hatred. I will not lend my name to it, and I won't stay quiet while it borrows the name of the party that built me — the party of Rich Bastien, Robert Hawke, and of the coalitions of

2010, 2014, 2017, 2020 of people who did the unglamorous work and never asked for credit.

My party can do better. Un-registering would be easier, and probably more aligned with who I am as a person. I intend to stay and make it better. Because when we don't, decent people watch and decide the work isn't

worth it, and every one of these four towns is poorer for it. The path changed. The purpose never did. The purpose was always these four towns.

Character is on the ballot. I know where mine stands.

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