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Print Page

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Local leaders divided on Trump, united on Clinton

Roger Rascoe isn't naming any favorites in the narrowing field of Republican presidential candidates, but says he's excited by the huge turnout in the party's primaries and the new voters Donald Trump's candidacy has attracted. He expects Trump to help all Republicans on the ballot this fall if he leads the ticket.

"I really believe that our base is motivated this year, and that's going to help us," said Rascoe, the Ulster County Republican chairman.

Dick Coombe, the Republican chairman in Sullivan County, is not so upbeat. He supports Ohio Gov. John Kasich, but sees no chance for him. Trump's ascent has stunned him.

"He's certainly resonated with people," Coombe said. "Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump are perceived as outsiders, and people are sick and tired of the gridlock in Washington."

Reactions among Republican leaders in Orange, Ulster and Sullivan counties to Trump's roll on Super Tuesday ran the gamut from enthusiasm to dismay. Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus, landing somewhere in between, expressed his preference for Kasich and misgivings about Trump, but said he was equally concerned about Trump's and Clinton's ability to handle the foreign challenges the country faces. Trump, he said, will have to prove himself during the campaign.

"He needs to bring in a team and show the country that he has a team that knows what it's doing," he said.

Democratic leaders were more uniformly enthusiastic about having Hillary Clinton as their probable standard-bearer, although each was careful to acknowledge a strong contingent of support for Sanders within their party.

"There's certainly a large, activist part of our party that is backing Sen. Sanders," Orange County Democratic Chairman Brett Broge said

Broge said he expects Clinton — a Westchester County resident and former New York senator — to increase Democratic turnout in Orange and help the party's other candidates in November if she's the nominee. He's less sure about Trump's potential impact on down-ballot races, calling it "a bit of a wild card."

"Trump, I think, appeals to a white, working-class voter, and that's a certain part of the Democratic coalition," Broge said.

Ulster Democratic Chairman Frank Cardinale praised Clinton as exceptionally qualified — and scrutinized — and predicted Democrats in general will do well in the region, if only because of the customary bump in Democratic turnout in presidential years.

"When Democrats vote, Democrats win," he said. "It's that simple."

Sullivan Democratic Chairwoman Donna Schick said she stayed neutral on the Democratic race until this week, but will begin campaigning for Clinton as the likely nominee. As for Trump's impact on the race: "I don't know if it's good or bad. I just know it's scary."

SUNY New Paltz political scientist Gerald Benjamin, who is a Republican, shed his scholar's detachment to say he was "horrified" at the prospect of Trump as the party's nominee. He argues Trump would likely motivate Democratic voters and hurt Republican candidates, including those running for New York's narrowly divided Senate.

"One thing for sure, it's going to elevate turnout on the other side, because he's got everybody upset and worried," Benjamin said.

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Benjamin

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