

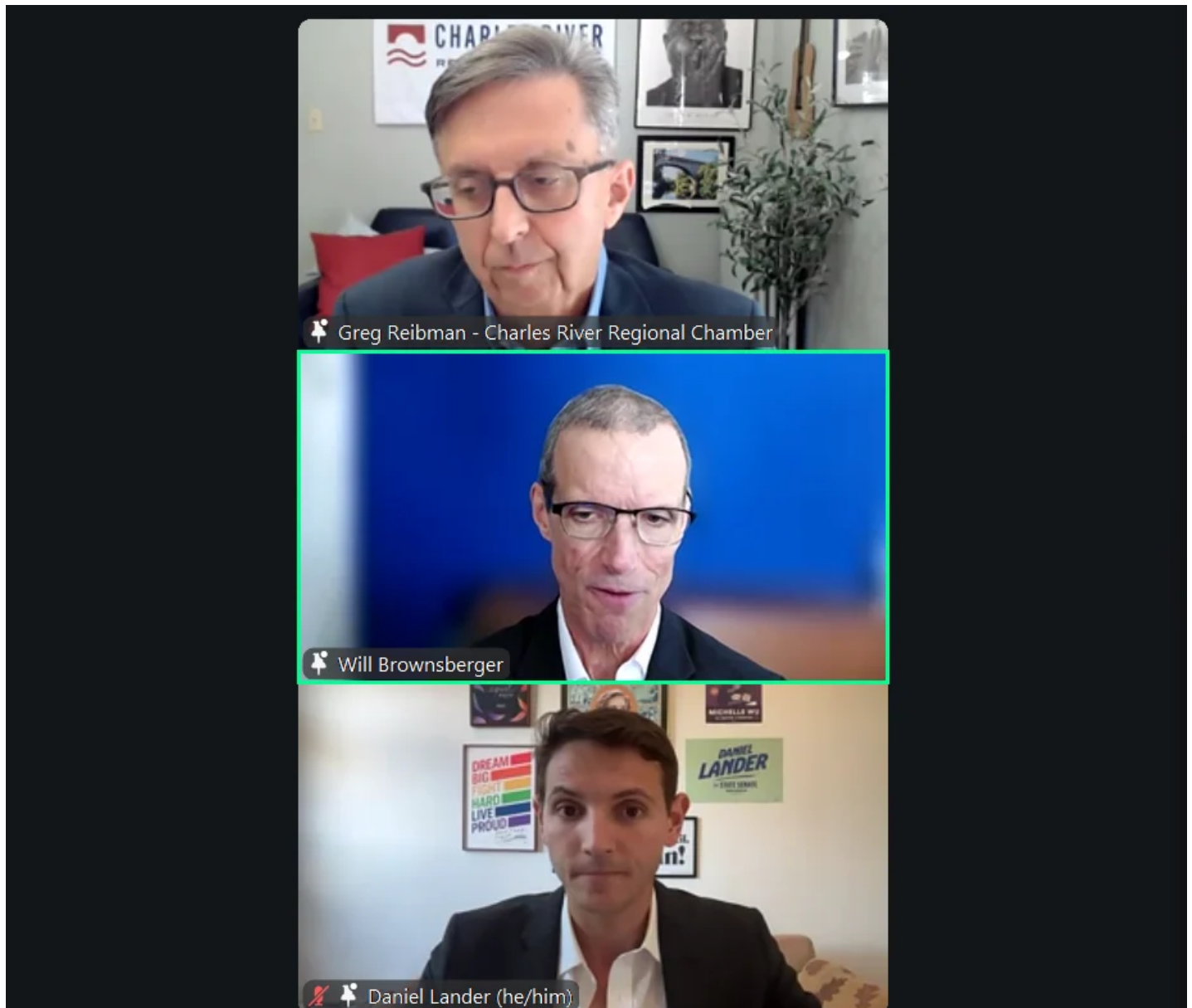
https://www.statehousenews.com/news/politics/elections/brownsberger-lander-clash-over-the-power-of-one-senator/article_58422a3c-4a1a-4a9b-ad79-2b7685be7bcf.html

Brownsberger, Lander clash over the power of one senator

Incumbent points to his track record; challenger says good ideas 'go to die without a vote'

Ella Adams

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From top-down: Charles River Regional Chamber President and CEO Greg Reibman, Sen. William Brownsberger and Democratic challenger Daniel Lander participate in a moderated debate on Aug. 20, 2026 on Zoom.

Screenshot

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, Aug. 20, 2026.....In the outsider-versus-institution competition brewing in the Democratic primary race between Sen. William Brownsberger of Belmont and challenger Daniel Lander of Fenway, the role and power of a single legislator took center stage Thursday.

Lander, a former aide to Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, is a first-time candidate. Brownsberger is the third-highest ranking member of the Senate, where he's been since 2012 and holds the position of Senate president pro tempore. Before his time in the Senate, he was a state representative and Belmont selectman.

Lander said he started thinking about running at the end of the 2024 legislative session — which he called a "five-car pileup" — after several proposals he had been working with advocates to pass died, including one to impose a transfer fee on luxury real estate. On Thursday, he called Beacon Hill a place "where good ideas go to die without a vote every single year."

"It's no surprise to you that the Legislature has a reputation for taking too long to get things done and for letting good ideas languish," Charles River Regional Chamber President and CEO Greg Reibman said during the debate he moderated between the candidates. He noted that a recently signed immigrant protection law took months to get through the Legislature and that the so-called DRIVE Act that Gov. Maura Healey filed in July 2025 hasn't passed.

"Why should voters not want to express their dissatisfaction with these kinds of things and vote you out?" Reibman asked the incumbent Brownsberger.

The Belmont Democrat replied, "There's nothing that I don't want to see disclosed about the operations of the Legislature," and said "the Legislature, as compared to other places, does a pretty good job of making a lot of information available that's not even asked for."

Pressed about the "urgency of getting important things done," Brownsberger said, "We did have a rough night that July 31, 2024."

The final day of regular formal sessions in 2024 featured a nearly 24-hour session in which lawmakers did not reach a compromise on several packages of bills that had been deemed priorities. But "all those things got done by the end of the year, and you know, that was just a tough year. There was a lot of conflict, and you know, that's the nature of the legislative process," Brownsberger said.

"This is a herd of 200 cats," he said of the Legislature.



A campaign mailer sent out to promote Sen. Will Brownsberger's reelection campaign.

Brownsberger called the immigrant protection law "an urgent matter" and said he would have liked to see it done earlier.

"But the truth is, I'm not the only legislator up there, and it took a while to build consensus on that," he said.

"If you look, I was screaming for action back in March 2025," Brownsberger continued. "It's not like one guy gets to decide when things happen. I will say this though: Massachusetts is actually way

ahead of a lot of places, and this is important to understand."

Lander went on the offense, describing how people "have watched Beacon Hill drag their feet" for a year and a half on immigration protections, and saying that "other blue states passed similar laws months, if not a year, ago."

"We actually don't need consensus to pass a law like that. We just need a majority," Lander argued. "We have supermajorities in the Legislature, and on an issue where people were screaming, right, the Legislature dragged their feet. And Senator Brownsberger, with all due respect, you're the Senate pro temp. You are one of the most powerful people up there. So if you cannot move that legislation that you claim you were sort of really trying to push in March of last year, right, then what can you push up there?"

Healey signed the PROTECT Act on Aug. 5 in Chelsea in an effort to boost protections for immigrants in Massachusetts. The bill mirrors a proposal initially put forward by the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus last year.

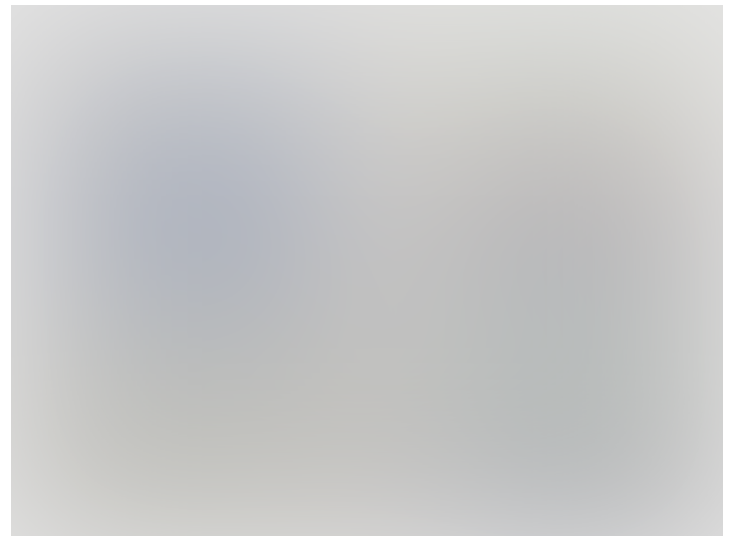
On the DRIVE Act, Lander said the Legislature's response "has kind of been to shrug" and "to let it sit for a long time and then cut it in half, and then let it continue to sit."

The House in March reported out a new draft (H 5259) of Healey's research and higher education funding bill, chopping its bottom line. The new version of the bill was unanimously referred to House Ways and Means on April 15.

"I wish I could tell you that I could move everything, but the big things do take consensus, and they take a level of consensus, you know, enough votes to pass, and the fact that we have Democrats does not guarantee enough votes to pass. And they have to be passed in a fiscal context. And that's basically what's happening with the DRIVE Act," Brownsberger replied. "I do hope we can get to that place."

Asked what voters would lose if they elect a freshman senator, Brownsberger named routine local benefits for the district and his past accomplishments.

"My track record has been a force for good in every session. I have done something big in every session I've served," he said, naming the 2024 affordable housing package, a 2022 redistricting plan, police reform of 2020, criminal justice reforms of 2018, and years of work on non-competition agreements.



A campaign mailer sent out to promote Daniel Lander's campaign for state Senate.

Lander retorted, "I actually don't think that taking 10 years to do non-compete reform that didn't fix the problem ... is a record of success."

When it comes to fundraising, Brownsberger brought in over \$45,200 in July compared to Lander's just more than \$18,000 in the same period, according to the Office of Campaign and Political Finance. Lander received donations from several individuals who work for the city and Wu.

Wu said in June that she did not recruit Lander to run, but has called out Brownsberger and Sen. Nick Collins for opposing her property tax shift proposal. Wu is also backing a Collins opponent, Democrat Latoya Gayle.

The Massachusetts AFL-CIO threw its support behind Lander in August, as did Auditor Diana DiZoglio, who called him "committed to increasing transparency and accountability in our Legislature, particularly in our Senate." The issue of transparency isn't new to Brownsberger, who has written on his blog as far back as 2010 about transparency-related measures he has pushed while on Beacon Hill.

Three Watertown city councilors recently flipped on their endorsements of Brownsberger, defecting to Lander. Brownsberger has gained endorsements from former labor secretary and Boston mayor Marty Walsh.

"Senator Brownsberger is making clear that even at the top of the heap, right, he's unable to pull good ideas that people are screaming for forward," Lander said Thursday. "I think we need leaders who aren't going to tell everyone why things are too complicated, why they're too hard, why we need just 100% consensus from everything."

The two Democrats also went back and forth on issues like rent control, property tax shift proposals and credit card swipe fees. Both candidates said they're supportive of the ballot question that would implement residential zoning reform (Question 7), a policy implementing duplexes by right, and the "Yes in God's backyard" housing proposal.

Brownsberger called rent control "a disaster with regard to the message it sends to the development community," while Lander said he would have supported the former ballot proposal to implement rent control so voters can "send a message" to lawmakers.

Brownsberger maintained his opposition to Wu's proposed property tax shift proposal that died in the Senate more than once, explaining that "it would have set loose an unraveling of a very fundamental compromise that has governed taxation in this state for a number of years."

Lander said "in very specific examples" should any community be able to shift its commercial property tax burden above 175% of what the residential burden is.

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