

Eager to put on a show of force in a general election battleground state, President Donald Trump tried to rattle Democrats on Monday with a rally in New Hampshire on the eve of the state's first-in-the-nation primaries.

Trump, on a high after his acquittal last week on impeachment charges, boasted about the nation's strong economy, tore into his possible general election foes and launched an assault on the Democrats who tried to remove him from office, calling the episode a "pathetic partisan crusade."

"Our good Republicans in the United States Senate voted to reject the outrageous partisan impeachment hoax and to issue a full, complete and absolute total acquittal," Trump told a crowd that roared and cheered through-out his speech. "And it wasn't even close."

Trump's rally comes a day before New Hampshire Democrats head to the polls following the disastrous Iowa caucuses that failed to produce a clear-cut winner to take Trump on in November. Trump mocked the lingering uncertainty over the outcome of the party's kickoff caucuses, where the results are still under dispute.

"Does anyone know who won Iowa?" he asked the crowd. "I don't know."

Before leaving Washington, Trump said he had planned the rally to rattle Democrats and demonstrate his strength in the state before the primary vote.

"Want to shake up the Dems a little bit - they have a really boring deal going on," Trump tweeted. "Still waiting for the Iowa results, votes were fried. Big crowds in Manchester!"

It's a tried-and-tested tactic for Trump: Scheduling counter-programming to divert attention from Democratic debates and other major moments, keeping him in the spotlight and building supporters' enthusiasm in the months before Election Day.

At the same time, Trump continued to celebrate the Senate's acquittal decision, lacing into House Speaker Nancy Pelosi for her performance during his State of the Union address last week.

"I had somebody behind me who was mumbling terribly, mumbling, mumbling," Trump complained, calling it "very distracting, very distracting." He did not make mention of how, at the address' conclusion, Pelosi tore up her copy of the speech.

Trump's remarks prompted the crowd to break into the same "Lock her up!!" chant that his supporters directed at Hillary Clinton four years ago.

It wasn't the only return feature from his 2016 rallies. In a nod to the longtime supporters who have returned to his rallies again, Trump returned to one of his greatest, if rarest hits, delivering a spoken-word performance of "The Snake," a dark 1960s song he has used as an allegory to warn of what he sees as the dangers of illegal immigrants and refugees allowed into the United States.

Though it isn't presenting the same show of force as last week, when dozens of Trump's surrogates flooded Iowa, the Trump campaign made its presence known in New Hampshire. In addition to Vice President Mike Pence and Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and senior adviser, Republican Sens. Lindsey Graham and Rand Paul, House Republican Whip Steve Scalise and New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu were set to campaign on his behalf Tuesday. The marquee event was held in front of a sold-out crowd of thousands at a downtown Manchester arena, and Trump made sure viewers at home knew it.

"We have more in this arena and outside of this arena than all of the other candidates, meaning the Democrats, put together and multiplied times five," he boasted.

Images of bundled-up supporters camped outside the SNHU Arena also broke through the news coverage of the Democratic primary. As Air Force One touched down in New Hampshire, a stream of TrumpWorld luminaries — including Vice President Mike Pence and first son Donald Trump Jr. — preceded the president to the stage.

A frequent topic from the stage: broadsides against the impeachment that imperiled Trump's presidency.

"Justice was served, our Constitution was defended and President Trump was acquitted forever!" Pence told the roaring crowd.

New Hampshire has always loomed large in Trump's political lore as the first nominating contest he won during 2016's heated Republican primaries. He was about to take the stage at a rally in Manchester that October when news broke that the FBI was re-opening its investigation into Democrat Hillary Clinton's emails, breathing new life into his then-struggling campaign. And it was the site of the penultimate rally of the 2016 contest — an extravagant send-off just hours before a post-midnight rally in Michigan.

Though Trump narrowly lost New Hampshire in the general election four years ago, his team believes it is one of the few states, along with Minnesota and perhaps New Mexico, that could flip to red in November.

"We are going to win New Hampshire in a landslide," Trump predicted, insisting that registered Democrat voters are leaving their party "to join our movement."

Democrats in the state had a different view.

"It's obvious that Trump and the RNC are desperate to put New Hampshire in play after losing the state by 3,000 votes in 2016. But we'll make sure that Granite Staters know that he has broken his promises to his state and he will lose here again in November," New Hampshire Democratic Party Chairman Ray Buckley told reporters.

The president relished the idea of dominating the stage in New Hampshire and stealing some of the media oxygen from the Democrats. Advisers hoped that Secret Service moves in downtown Manchester to secure the area for the president's arrival would make it harder for Democratic candidates and their supporters to transverse the state's largest city in the hours before the primary's first votes are cast.

At least for now, similar counter-programming rallies have not been planned for the next two nominating states, Nevada and South Carolina.

Trump has not hesitated to try to influence the Democrats' nominating process. At the rally, he urged New Hampshire independents — who are allowed to vote in either party's primary — who support him to instead back "the weakest" Democratic candidate Tuesday. He also, again, trafficked in the unfounded conspiracy theory that buses of illegal voters traveled in from Massachusetts in 2016 to deprive him of a victory in the Granite State.

Moreover, he and his advisers frequently huddle to map out strategy against possible general election foes and the president has in recent weeks tried to bolster the candidacy of Sen. Bernie Sanders, the most liberal candidate in the Democratic field and the opponent the White House, at least for now, most wishes to face.

And with the Iowa results in question, Trump tried to plant a seed of doubt in their validity, eager to drum up conspiracies to foster divides among Democrats that could weaken party unity going into November.

"They are doing it to you again, Bernie, they are doing it to you again," Trump said in another nod to 2016, when Sanders lost the presidential nomination to Clinton.

The president has also unleashed a series of attacks on Sen. Elizabeth Warren and former New

York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who is not competing in New Hampshire. Of course, it was Trump's effort to have Ukraine investigate former Vice President Joe Biden that led to his impeachment.

The Manchester rally comes days after Trump was acquitted by the Senate after becoming just the third president in U.S. history to be impeached. Before his departure, Trump was still stewing at Democrats as well as Sen. Mitt Romney, the lone Republican to vote to convict him. At a White House meeting with more than 30 governors from around the country, he slammed Democrats for "wasting time" on impeachment and teasingly asked Utah Gov. Gary Herbert: "How's Mitt Romney? You can keep him. We don't want him."

He also called out Romney during the rally, prompting the crowd to erupt into a chorus of boos. With his reelection effort heating up, Trump also suggested he's trying to turn the page and notch a couple of legislative victories before November.

The president said he was hopeful that Democrats would work with him to pass an infrastructure bill as well legislation to lower prescription drug prices, despite the rancor and divisions.--Net