

Democrats v. Democrats

There's nothing like intra-party fighting to keep things from moving forward. The Democrats, despite majorities in the House and Senate, can't seem to get on the same page this legislative session and move through anything of substance.

This may be a good thing, especially for those Vermonters who prefer less government regulation and intrusion.

Still, Vermonters overwhelmingly voted Democratic in the last election — turning out one Republican statewide candidate and helping the party pick up seats in traditionally GOP strongholds in Rutland and Franklin counties.

There is little chance these voters will be happy with this first half of the biennium. There was hope that lawmakers might take the next step in reforming the health care system to help further lower the growth in health care premiums for the 90 percent of Vermonters who do have health insurance.

There was hope that lawmakers might take an honest look at reducing the property tax burden facing many communities, either through a new funding formula that included an income tax, or substantially reviewing the root causes of these increasingly rising education budgets.

Gov. Jim Douglas cannot be left off the hook either. He seems to be more interested in political navel-gazing and watching the opposition party implode and squabble than cut through the noise and offer true ideas that can unite lawmakers.

His education budget cap proposal went nowhere, and saw no one ready to push the concept to a vote, yet he offered nothing more that might move lawmakers into that direction more fully than what paltry offer was passed by the House. The measure to decrease the spending threshold by a few percentage points will do little to curb spending in the next couple of years.

In short, there was a lot of hope and talk at the beginning of the year about working together, but in the end, it was the same old, same old. That's too bad — especially for the Vermonters who now have to wait another year before seeing any substantive work being done on the issues that truly matter to them.

And then, it's not likely we'll be treated to anything more than campaign promises, just like this past year. Sigh.

Doyle poll provides pulse of Vermont

For 39 years, Sen. Bill Doyle, R-Washington, has been taking our pulse on Town Meeting Day through a 14-question survey (and optional long-form answers).

This year, Doyle's poll found that while Vermonters are pessimistic about the present, they do see hope on the horizon.

This year, 10,510 surveys from 168 towns were collected from all 14 Vermont counties, up from 9,200 returns last year. The survey asked Vermonters questions ranging from same-sex marriage to early preferences in the 2008 presidential campaign.

The most intriguing, however, were about the state of the current economy and its future.

Last year, 44 percent of Vermonters were "optimistic" about the future of the state's economy, and 33 percent were not. This year, only 35 percent were optimistic, while 41 percent were not.

Most Vermonters believe that statewide cell phone and broadband service are important to the future of the state's economy, and 68 percent of those surveyed believe that commercial wind turbines should be built on Vermont's ridgelines.

Vermonters also believe we should "take the lead in addressing global warming." According to the survey, 61 percent of those surveyed said Vermont should take a leadership role, while 27 percent said no, and another 12 percent was unsure.

Vermonters see becoming energy independent through greater investment and allowance for cleaner power sources as a crucial economic development component to our future.

Vermonters can read the market tea leaves, and they know that companies headquartered here continue to lead the way in many ways in terms of corporate responsibility and technological innovations designed to ensure a cleaner energy future that is less reliant on fossil fuels as a source of energy.

If only our elected officials would listen and stop treating alternative energy and corporate responsibility as if it's an anathema to corporate profits. In the coming business era in which the world deals with climate change and a carbon-constrained world, it may be our saving grace.



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Publisher's Message

In our April 6 issue, the Vermont Guardian published a Q&A with one of the directors of the Marlboro Grad Center's sustainability program.

The interview was conducted by our regular staff writer, Christian Avard, who also sells advertising. One of his accounts is Marlboro College, and they are currently advertising the program in the *Guardian*.

This information was not presented to readers, and as publisher and editor, the error rests solely with me.

It's a story that I should not have allowed to go to print at least in the form it appeared. In the future I will take additional steps to ensure that even the appearance of a conflict of interest is either disclosed to you, the reader, or avoided entirely.

Small newsrooms where the publisher also wears the hat of editor are much different in form than those of large media organizations with more distinct "walls" between advertising and editorial. However, in substance we are the same and we need to ensure the reader trusts that what we are providing to them is of value and not unduly influenced.

I can assure you that the current ad contract, which is several hundred dollars, did not weigh heavily in our interest to profile the school's program.

That said, I want to sincerely apologize to Christian Avard, to Marlboro College, to our readers, and to the programs at other Vermont institutions that offer similar degrees. My decision should not reflect poorly on them.

It is our intention to profile all of these fine degree programs, over time, as the *Guardian* believes that Vermont's colleges and universities are offering something both unique and about to become very heavily in demand.

Shay Totten

House backs faulty program

Vermont's at-risk three- and four-year-olds are covered by public pre-kindergarten. Additional children are currently enrolled regardless of need under a questionable Department of Education rule, and the Vermont House just voted to endorse and expand this "free" program to even more children, subject to a cap (*Vermont Guardian*, April 5).

Currently overburdened taxpayers should consider first that a 16-year study financed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, reported March 26 in *The New York Times* and elsewhere, found:

- Keeping a pre-schooler in a day care center for a year or more increased the likelihood that the child will become disruptive in class;
- Math and reading gains didn't last past first grade; and,
- The quality of parenting children receive is a far stronger and more consistent predictor of achievement and social functioning.

Second, the Tax Foundation reported April 4 that Vermonters now bear the highest state and

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