Viewpoints. . .Yours and ours

Letters

Benson reiterates top issue facing voters

To the Editor:

Last week, the *Journal Opinion* published the responses of a questionnaire of the two Orange County Senate candidates.

The first question was "What are the top issues or concerns you are hearing from constituents as you campaign in the district?" Understandably, the *Journal Opinion* attempted to trim candidate responses for length, but the newspaper editor inadvertently trimmed my answer in a way that affected the content that led to a grammatical error in the answer to the first question. After discussing this with editorial staff, I'm submitting a letter to the editor that includes my full response to the question for voters to read:

The top issues I am hearing about as I travel across Orange County are three-fold: First, education and property taxes. Vermonters are paying more, but our kids are getting less. Right here in Orange County, roughly 60% of third-grade students are not meeting proficiency standards in math. Yet our education property tax burden is one of the highest in the entire nation. This is unaffordable, unsustainable, and unacceptable. Vermonters deserve a high-quality education system for our kids at a price we can afford.

Second, mandates on rural Vermont. The passage of the disastrous "Act 181" was a wake-up call for many Vermonters. Since my appointment to the Vermont Senate by Governor Scott earlier this year, I have been laser-focused on our rural economy. But far too many of our farmers, forest-based businesses, and other rural Vermonters are struggling. From Bradford to Brookfield, the small towns and villages that once made up the backbone of our state have been left behind.

And third, health care and housing costs. Vermonters pay the highest health insurance premiums in the entire nation, with some of the least-expensive plan options staring us right in the face across the Connecticut River in New Hampshire. Meanwhile, access to housing for our workforce continues to be a challenge due in large part to regulatory hurdles from Montpelier. A single mom in Fairlee shouldn't have to choose between paying her property taxes or paying her health insurance premiums. A retired couple in Topsham living on a fixed income shouldn't have to keep dipping into their ever-dwindling nest egg to just make ends meet. That is the affordability crisis we face.

Senator John Benson
Brookfield, VT

CORRECTION: In the Oct. 7 edition of the *Journal Opinion*, Sen. John Benson's response to the first question in the Election Preview was inadvertently deleted in the editing process. We regret the error. See letter above for corrected response.

Reelect Tagliavia

To the Editor:

We are writing to express our deep gratitude to Rep. Mike Tagliaiva for his incredible work representing us during the last biennium.

Very early on, in fact before he was even elected, Rep. Tagliavia was sounding the alarm to warn us all to take a real close look at what the Regional Planning Commissions were actually trying to do to our lands, our pocketbooks, and our futures.

Mike has been available for our questions, he listens to our concerns, and in our opinion his votes represent us accurately. We are very happy that he is not afraid to speak up for us. We need more people like him in Montpelier.

We are confident Representative Mike Tagliavia will continue to vote to protect our rural values, and our rural traditions. We encourage you all to vote to send Rep. Mike Tagliavia back to Montpelier.

There is still a lot of work to be done!

Brian and Rebecca O'Meara
Orange, VT

We voted for Aiden

To the Editor:

Taking advantage of our early voting opportunity, we have already voted for Aiden Otterman for State Representative.

We acknowledge Susan Culp's experience and we appreciate the good work that Tom Otterman (and his wife, Donna) have done for the town of Topsham for many years, but we think this is a very good time for an infusion of new ideas and new energy into our state legislature. For that reason, we voted for Aiden.

He is already knowledgeable about the workings of the legislature because of his service on the Vermont State Youth Council, a group of young people from all counties in the state who advise the Governor and the Legislature about policies that impact young people in our state. (At one time, he served as President of the Council.)

At a time when many people are concerned about the fact that young people are leaving the state, Aiden can be a voice in addressing this issue. We have found Aiden to be someone who has studied other important issues in Vermont and has the ability to articulate sound proposals for making life better for all Vermonters.

We hope many others will vote for Aiden.

John and Susan Morris
Topsham, VT

No Bradford impeachments

To the Editor:

On Nov. 3, Bradford voters will have the opportunity to vote on a charter change, allowing for an impeachment procedure for any elected official, "except Justices of the Peace."

Proponents and Vermont law sanitize it as a "recall procedure."

I did not sign the petition presented to me. It included an additional summary procedure page. That summary excluded the last sentence in paragraph A, as quoted: "No statement of cause shall be required."

Apparently, one's voting record, politics, religion, gender, race, sexuality, personality, and hairstyle are all fair game.

This is not how we conduct politics in Bradford. Instead, a fair and square election at the ballot box is the answer. I encourage a "no" impeachment procedure vote on Nov. 3.

Byron Kidder
Bradford, VT

ABOUT THIS PAGE: The opinion page of the *Journal Opinion* is devoted to editorials, commentary and letters. The views and opinions are of the authors only.

We encourage readers to comment on matters of interest and will publish letters regardless of their politics providing they are in good taste. We ask that you limit letters to 400 words or less and write no more than twice per month. All letters must be signed with contact information given for verification.

The publisher reserves the right to verify the accuracy of letters, edit letters for clarity, space and content, and limit the number of letters from any writer to two a month. Anonymous letters or letters judged to be libelous will not be published.

The deadline for letters and commentaries is Monday at noon. They may be mailed to the *Journal Opinion*, PO Box 378, Bradford, VT 05033, emailed to editor@jonews.com.

Species of greatest conservation need

To the Editor:

It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve my constituents and communities as your House Representative at the State House. I am dedicated and engaged at all times to work for you and help ensure that the State is working for Vermonters so that we can afford to live here in our wonderful home of Vermont. Bringing your voice to the table is my highest priority.

This past legislative session, I served on the House Environment Committee. As a policy committee, there was a tremendous learning curve and after laying the groundwork, we were able to make significant headway in service to Vermonters.

A major highlight was our ability to repeal aspects of Act 181 (of 2024) which directly harmed Vermonters, especially the largest percentage of Vermont, rural Vermont. A hard-fought, deserving win for our district and the whole of the state, this bipartisan effort reflects the work that can be done when we move beyond partisan politics and come together in good faith to do what is best for Vermont.

In my committee, one key educational understanding I received was the idea of the "species of greatest conservation need," roughly defined as a wildlife species in need of proactive conservation. Vermont's current (2025-2035) draft Wildlife Action Plan states that high-priority SGCN are generally species that are rare or vulnerable, show negative population trends, face immediate threats to survivability, or risk local extirpation.

My committee heard countless testimony on this concept as we reviewed bills, developed policy and considered action steps.

There is indeed a species in Vermont under constant threat: Threat of the loss of their habitat and home, threats to their land and their ability to survive the regular attacks of predators that infringe upon and invade their lives.

Their ecosystem is imbalanced and under strain due to laws which endanger their way of life, their culture and their attempts at survival. Barriers have been created making it more difficult for this species which often forces migration away from their homes, further threatening their ability to thrive and raise their young.

I witnessed this constant and escalating endangerment in most committee agendas including my House Environment Committee. Despite my attempts, not enough action was taken to ensure the survival of this species and support their way of life. Shockingly in many instances they were not even considered in the discussions although testimony ensuring their stories and voices were part of the conversation was available.

The attack was coming from all fronts, making it more difficult for this keystone species to survive and have an opportunity at success.

In all of my work, I was most dedicated to protecting this species, to ensuring this threatened group had the means, opportunity, and support for a chance at survival after decades of progressive policy that has increased their threatened situation and possible extinction.

Although there are numerous species under ecological threat, the species identified here is the Vermonter, the hard-working Vermonter, real Vermonters, our farmers, loggers, and business owners. They are struggling and trying to communicate.

Unfortunately, for the past decades, leadership at the State House has silenced and often ignored these voices. This is unacceptable and must be remedied.

The voice of this 'species of greatest conservation need' is a necessary part of the conversation that has been minimized for far too long. It is this voice that I am dedicated to bringing to the table in all aspects of policy development and consideration. As an elected representative, I serve the people. Ensuring that my constituents, communities and Vermonters are a priority consideration at the State House is my goal and I will work hard at all times to bring this voice and vote to the State House.

I am seeking reelection to continue this work and uphold my commitment to the communities I represent and the whole of Vermont. I will continue to work hard for all species under threat, especially my constituents and Vermonters who have every right to continue their way of life and must be supported by constructive laws that allow their continued survival. This includes a focus on affordability and ensuring there are options available for all to decide what works best for them and their families.

I will continue to be a strong, determined compassionate voice for you in the State House and I humbly and respectful request your support for re-election.

Please feel free to contact me anytime, I will try my best to help you.

Rep. Michael "Mike" Tagliavia
Corinth, VT

The writer, a Republican, represents Orange 1 in the Vermont House of Representatives. He is seeking reelection.

Benson has experience we need

To the Editor:

I have known John Benson for nearly 30 years — as a firefighter, engineer, fellow selectboard member, and friend. In every role, I have seen the same qualities: he listens carefully, solves problems thoughtfully, communicates well and follows through.

I first met John through the Brookfield Volunteer Fire Department, where he served alongside my husband, Jeff, and later became chief. John worked to build a skilled department with the equipment and training it needed to protect our community. He sought grants for major purchases while keeping the cost of fire protection in mind for Brookfield taxpayers.

We also worked together on complex transportation projects. John brought engineering expertise, an understanding of state permitting, and an ability to bring people with different interests to the table. He kept projects moving toward results that served both the transportation network and the communities affected.

When we served on our respective selectboards, we shared ideas about the rising cost of ambulance service and regional approaches to law enforcement. We also worked together during flood recovery. If one of our towns learned something useful, we passed it along to help the other.

Across all those experiences, John's approach has been consistent. He asks good questions before deciding, weighs the needs of the people involved, and explains his decisions clearly —even when someone disagrees. That kind of candor builds trust.

John also knows how to get people working together. His relationships with local, state, and federal leaders across party lines help him find answers, navigate difficult permits, and bring resources to a problem. He cares more about finding a workable solution than scoring political points.

I have watched John put those skills to work for decades. His judgment, experience, and commitment to the communities he serves are exactly what we need in Montpelier.

Trini Brassard
East Randolph, VT

Tom O for state rep

To the Editor:

I have been a resident and registered voter in the Town of Groton for over 30 years.

As the general election approaches I am fully supporting Tom Otterman to represent our legislative district.

Tom is a sixth generation native of West Topsham and is the son of the late Bud Otterman who represented us in the House of Representatives for four Terms.

Tom has been a business owner for two-plus decades and has served on several municipal positions in his community.

While it is encouraging to see an 18-year-old young man wanting to serve in the House he lacks the experience and life skills necessary to make decisions for the state of Vermont.

Therefore, I urge everyone to vote for Tom Otterman, a Republican, for House on Nov. 3.

Your vote does matter, so please vote!

Lise Shallberg
Groton, VT

Mills is the right choice

To the Editor:

We have known Lance Mills for more than 30 years, and both of us have had the opportunity to work alongside him at various times. Over those many years, we have come to know Lance as someone who is approachable, hardworking, and deeply committed to the people and causes he believes in.

Lance's easygoing personality makes him someone people feel comfortable talking with, but behind that easygoing manner is a determined advocate. When Lance believes something is important, particularly when it affects everyday working people, he is willing to speak up, listen, and do the work necessary to make their voices heard.

His dedication to education is perhaps the clearest example. As a teacher, Lance has spent years working directly with students (including our two sons) and understanding the challenges they and their families face. As a union representative, he has also worked to ensure that educators have the support and resources they need to do their jobs well.

Those of us who have crossed paths with Lance over the years know the sincerity and commitment he brings to his work. We believe those same qualities would serve him well as a state representative for Bradford, Fairlee, and West Fairlee, and we are proud to support his candidacy.

Phillip and Theresa Metayer
Bradford, VT

In support of Culp

To the Editor:

Well, I am breaking my own rule here. As an employee of the Town of Newbury, albeit in a very minor capacity, I've avoided making public my political positions. But I feel impelled to do so now in support of Susan Culp's candidacy for VT State Representative.

I've seen how Susan's leadership on the Newbury Selectboard and her work on the Planning Commission and other volunteer boards have benefitted our town. She is unfailingly respectful of everyone and brings such a valuable background of experience to the table. Even better, she looks at every issue without partisan bias.

Susan follows in the footsteps of many other Newbury leaders (Signa Carbee, Al Stevens, and Alma Roystan come to mind), with vision, diplomacy, and integrity. I will vote to have Susan represent us in Montpelier.

Peggy Hewes
Newbury, VT

Priestley demonstrates leadership

To the Editor:

At a time when Vermont faces serious challenges, we need leaders who listen to differing perspectives and have the experience, energy, and integrity to deliver meaningful results. We need leaders who understand that public office carries a responsibility to be accessible, responsive, and accountable. Monique Priestley exemplifies these qualities.

Rather than contributing to the negativity and division dominating political discourse, Monique approaches public service with empathy, respect, and a commitment to practical solutions.

As co-chair of the Rural Caucus, bringing together Republicans, Democrats, and Progressives, she ensures rural Vermonters have a voice in Montpelier. Her work helping repeal the excessively restrictive Tier 3 and road rule provisions of Act 181 demonstrates her willingness to listen to property owners and correct legislation with unintended consequences.

Monique understands the financial pressures facing Vermont families. She believes everyone should pay their fair share, fought for legislation to cap health care costs that Governor Scott vetoed, and supports affordable housing through investments in water and sewer infrastructure.

Equally important is how she treats her constituents. As a state representative, Monique maintained frequent office hours and responded promptly and effectively to inquiries. She made herself accessible, listened carefully, and took constituents' concerns seriously. Her responsiveness reflects her commitment to accountability. Her legislative experience and nationally recognized work on technology policy and consumer protection further demonstrate the expertise she brings to public service.

Monique combines energy, experience, sound judgment, and genuine empathy with a strong sense of responsibility. As a Bradford native, she understands rural Vermont and the people who call it home. I enthusiastically support Monique Priestley to represent Orange County in the Vermont Senate.

Marcey Carver
Bradford, VT

Our civic duty

To the Editor:

Voting is both our right and our civic duty. It's our opportunity to participate in how our towns, state and national government are run.

Let's celebrate the vote with our fellow citizens at the non-partisan rally sponsored by Third Act Newbury and Corinth/Topsham Indivisible on Oct. 17. Enjoy cider and doughnuts while spending time with your fellow citizens.

Not registered yet? The Newbury Town Clerk will be on hand to register voters. Remember that citizens who will be at least 18 on Nov. 3 can vote if registered.

Where? Newbury Common. When? Oct. 17, 10:30 a.m. till noon.

Denise Maria Fontaine
Newbury, VT

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