

Viewpoints. . .Yours and ours

Letters

Prepare for Bradford charter change vote

To the Editor:
Bradford voters will see a proposed change to the Town Charter on the Nov. 3 ballot.

The change would give Bradford voters a way to recall an elected Town official before the person's term is over. The purpose is to enable voters to hold our local elected officials accountable during their term of office.

Why might this ever be needed? An elected official might stop coming to meetings or stop doing the work of the office. An official might no longer be able or willing to do the job but not resign. There could also be serious misconduct or other circumstances that cause voters to believe an official should no longer remain in office.

The process for a recall would require strong support from voters. It would not be easy.

1. At least 15% of Bradford's registered voters would have to sign a petition asking for a recall vote. A recall could not be started during an official's first six months in office or during the last six months of the term. There could also be only one recall attempt against an official during the same term.

2. There would be a public meeting where voters and the official would have an opportunity to speak.

3. There would be a minimum number of total votes required. At least as many people would have to vote in the recall election as voted in the election when the official was elected. For example, if 800 people voted when the official was elected, at least 800 people would have to vote in the recall election. If only 700 voted, the recall would fail.

4. Two-thirds of the people voting on the recall question would have to vote in favor of the recall.

It would not be easy to recall an elected official. Recall should not be something that can be used simply because people disagree with an elected official.

There will be two public hearings on the proposed Charter change at Bradford Academy, Room 26, on Oct. 14 and Oct. 20 at 6 p.m. People may also attend by Zoom: bit.ly/BradfordSelectboard

The proposed Charter change is on the Nov. 3rd ballot and every registered Bradford voter is being mailed a ballot.

A 'Yes' vote means you support adding this recall process to Bradford's Town Charter. A 'No' vote means you do not.

The charter change does not recall anyone. It gives Bradford voters a process they could use in the future if the need ever arises.

*Marcey Carver
Bradford, VT*

The writer is the lead petitioner.

A welcoming Orange County needs Senator Benson

To the Editor:
I love our farm in Corinth. The decision to return to Vermont came to me in the middle of a potato field in war-torn Afghanistan, where women were tending their soil and persevering as they had for centuries. After years in Afghanistan, I yearned for a relationship with land. Orange County is now my home in a way no other place could ever be.

But when I look around our communities, I also see what's missing. I rarely meet anyone younger than I am. As one of the few minorities in our town, I know how welcoming we Vermonters can be, but we've been making policy choices that shut other people out. Young Vermonters are leaving. Families who might have moved here, and made our towns younger, more diverse, and more alive, can't afford to come. Farms are disappearing from the landscape. Even the free summer concerts that brought our county together have stopped under the threat of regulation.

None of this is inevitable. It comes from choices made in Montpelier, and Rep. Monique Priestley has too often made the wrong ones. A rural Vermont that is open to young farmers, working families, and newcomers has to be a place where they can afford to live and are free to build a life. Her votes have taken us in the opposite direction.

Act 181 threatened our farm and the young people who might want to farm after us. When we went looking for someone in Montpelier who would listen, John Benson was the first legislator to sit down with us. He has been present ever since, wherever the law's consequences are being decided.

Those consequences didn't arrive with the statute alone. They arrived later, through rulemaking and regional planning. This summer, the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission released a draft plan that Newbury called "super-zoning." The state's Land Use Review Board found that some of TRORC's rural mandates were potentially discriminatory and exclusionary.

Senator Benson advocated for us at the regional planning meetings. Last week, he wrote to TRORC's board documenting their repeated Open Meeting Law violations and the hardships their plan would impose. He also outlines a 2027 agenda to make meaningful public participation a priority.

I like Monique Priestley personally. But she voted for Act 181, then voted to override the Governor's veto. She supported a property tax bill that raised average bills 13.8 percent in a single year. As the consequences unfolded through regional planning, she was absent. At the TRORC meetings our family attended, we never saw her.

Representation isn't only how you vote. It's whether you show up afterward to deal with the impacts. John Benson has voted in the interests of Vermont's farmers and families, *and* he has kept showing up for us. Rep. Priestley hasn't. If we want a rural Vermont where young people stay, newcomers are welcome, and the next generation can afford to make a life here, we need Senator Benson back in the Senate.

*Ahn Wei Lee
Corinth, VT*

Celebrate our right to vote

To the Editor:
In our American democracy, the first words of our Constitution are: "We the People . . ." — which reminds us that we are the ones who choose our governmental leaders.

On Saturday, Oct. 17 from 10:30 a.m. until noon, there will be a rally on the Newbury Common to celebrate our right to vote. There will be free hot cider and doughnuts for everyone and information about where and how to vote in Vermont. Some rallygoers will be waving to passersby and encouraging them to vote.

This is a nonpartisan rally hosted by Newbury neighbors and friends. Everyone from all surrounding towns are welcome. Voters have the chance to exercise their unique American right to cast ballots for their favorite candidates. The rally sponsors hope voters will consider the opportunity to vote early and not wait until the last minute.

Vote early and vote wisely!

*John Morris
East Corinth, VT*

Hypocrisy 101

To the Editor:

Independent candidate Susan Culp is hands-down the best qualified candidate in the Orange-Caledonia race. If you know her work, you already know that. Even those that support her opponents of both parties agree. Susan's demonstrated ability, tenacity and focus — traits she has applied to issues in Newbury, will scale well to represent the district.

It's no secret that the local Democratic Party long courted Susan Culp to run as a Democrat, but she has long been Independent-minded. She stuck to her principles and categorically refused, as she cannot in good faith fully support the political games of the Democratic party leadership, as well as their policies that have hurt our community.

So it became 'any blue will do' — to the point of eventually settling on an unqualified, malleable, novelty candidate as their one-term bench warmer. The Democratic candidate, while a likeable and enthusiastic teen, is a Progressive masquerading as a centrist. And the party still openly acknowledges that Susan is clearly the better candidate.

But then, in a move straight out of the MAGA playbook, Democratic leadership resorted to fear mongering in emails to voters asking them to abandon support for Susan and rally behind their (acknowledged) significantly less qualified candidate because a vote for Culp will result in a "hard-right, Trump-aligned" Republican winning. So much for supporting the best person for the job based on merit. This may be considered 'just politics' but what disturbs me is the overt hypocrisy.

The Democratic candidate claims, per his campaign flyer, to want to "end political polarity" and "do away with partisan politics" while his campaign is working to get him elected using tactics that are epitome of political polarity and partisan politics. The hypocrisy of the Democratic candidate and his phalanx of Democratic party handlers is astounding. Worthless platform rhetoric revealed for what it is. Clearly he's a fast learner!

And let's face it, if it really was just about preventing an R from winning, or getting the best representation in the State House for Orange-Caledonia, that is much more attainable by getting fully behind the innately qualified independent candidate, Susan Culp.

*Tony O'Meara
Newbury, VT*

Powers for the people

To the Editor:

I encourage everyone to vote to reelect Debbie Powers for state legislature (Barnet, Ryegate and Waterford). Debbie is practical, hard-working, and principled. I've known Debbie for years, from before she got involved in politics. She's the right kind of politician: she's reluctant to be one. But once she answered the call, she devoted herself to her job in Montpelier.

We might not agree on every single issue, but I know she can be counted on to provide the right kind of balance in the state house. Debbie's business and agricultural background and her common-sense approach are exactly what Montpelier needs. She understands, for example, the importance of fiscal responsibility, and that current policies at the state level are not sustainable. She knows Vermonters' tax money doesn't grow on trees.

She has served faithfully and admirably in her first term, and she should be given the opportunity to serve another. I don't live in her district, but I encourage everyone who does to vote for her.

*Adam Hochschild
Plainfield, VT*

Vote 'No' on Proposals 3 and 4

To the Editor:

Regarding Proposal 4 so-called "Equality of Rights" amendment. This does not look like an equal rights amendment. The second sentence has a closed list of groups that would be protected, and the third sentence directs the courts to uphold government's preferential treatment and benefits to state-sanctioned "historically marginalized groups." Vote no on Proposal 4 so that the Vermont Legislature can draft a real Equal Rights Amendment.

Regarding Proposal 3 so-called "Right to Collective Bargaining." Proposal 3 would permanently prohibit Vermont from adopting a right-to-work law for the private sector. Proposal 3 would shift power from the legislature to unions.

People already have the right to form or join a union under the First Amendment's freedom of assembly clause. If farm workers are allowed to unionize under Proposal 3, production would go down and many Vermont farms would fold. This would hurt our state's food security and working landscape.

Illinois passed an amendment that prevented the state from passing right to work laws, and people are leaving Illinois. State pensions are underfunded in Illinois just as they are in Vermont, and forcing people to join unions as a condition of employment would only worsen Vermont's existing pension issues and other affordability issues. Vote "No" on Proposal 3.

*Suzanne Butterfield
Stockbridge, VT*

Elect Lance Mills

To the Editor:

Lance Mills would be a valuable addition to the Vermont Legislature and a strong representative for our area.

Lance has spent his entire adult life working and living in Vermont. After a career in construction, he chose to teach in our public schools for over two decades and was certified in English and construction. He was also elected to be president of the school union. He is the author of two published books both of which are rooted in our area. He currently serves on the Fairlee Selectboard.

This is the kind of experience and dedication to public service which predicts a successful legislator.

Please join me in voting for Lance Mills this Nov. 3 for our House Representative.

*Bruce Murray
Bradford, VT*

In support of Monique Priestley

To the Editor:

I'm a retired teacher and a seventh-generation Vermonter living in Stafford, and I'm writing to support Monique Priestley for the Orange County Senate seat.

Rural schools like Stafford's Newton School are under real pressure, and the conversation in Montpelier too often jumps straight to closing them. But one of the biggest costs school boards face, health insurance for school employees, is bargained statewide and is outside any local board's control. Premiums are rising again this year. Closing a community school doesn't change that. Addressing the cost does.

I've heard it said that health care is in better shape than people think and that the Legislature has already made a lot of changes. Some changes have been made, and I'm glad. But I'd invite anyone who feels settled about it to sit in on a school budget meeting, where a board has to pay a bill it didn't set and can't negotiate.

What I value most in Monique is that she asks before she decides. Over the past two legislative sessions, she has reached out to understand how bills will actually land in small schools like ours. That same instinct shapes her view on mergers: she supports smart, voluntary ones where towns want them, and she trusts communities to make that call for themselves. She grew up in rural Vermont, left, and came back, as I did, because this is where she wants to build a life. That tells me she understands what's at stake here.

Come meet her. Monique will be at Grandpa's Snack Shack in Stafford on Sunday, Oct. 11, from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

*Sarah Root
Stafford, VT*

Responsible spending matters for Vermonters

To the Editor:

As a fifth generation Vermont farmer, our family has a long tradition of public service and understands the importance of leadership that is grounded in common sense, fiscal responsibility, and a genuine commitment to the people it serves. That is why I am supporting John Benson for Orange County Senate.

John is a level-headed leader who listens and focuses on practical solutions. He understands what many Vermonters have been saying for years: Our state cannot continue on its current path. We must address the challenges that are making it increasingly difficult for young families, retirees on fixed incomes, farmers, and small businesses alike.

John is committed to improving affordability across our state. Affordability has become not just an economic issue but a quality of life issue for many Vermonters. Some are choosing to leave and some simply cannot afford to. Vermont must remain a place where families can build a future, young people can stay and work, and farms and local businesses can succeed.

Throughout my life, I have seen the value of Vermonters who put their communities first. John Benson embodies those qualities. His civil engineering background is exactly what our region needs today to navigate infrastructure and regulatory issues. He brings a balanced perspective and a clear understanding of the challenges facing our towns and Vermont as a whole.

I encourage my fellow voters to join me in supporting John Benson for Orange County Senate.

*Elijah White
Corinth, VT*

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Rambling Reflections

Foliage frolics

by Nessa Flax

Granted, no two leaf seasons are alike. Still — and maybe it is just me — it feels like something strange unfolds this year as the colors incrementally appear.

In an attempt to understand the nature of the weirdness, I have closely studied the leaves. No definitive answer yet, but here is a collection of observations.

It almost seems individual trees are changing amid a sea of still-green. The solitary exceptions, each standing out on its own, lonely spots of color.

Yellow is the dominant emerging color. Not even bright hues. And more crispy brown already appears than should so early in the season.

Reds are rare, as are blazing oranges. Really, it feels as if the mood on the hills is one of mild depression.

Note: it is Sept. 29 as I write. If foliage predictions are accurate, all will be brilliant in a week or two. In fact, according to the *Burlington Free Press* the season is anticipated to be "spectacular." Other sources point out that there will be a "rich and gradual transition of colors rather than a sudden, brief pop."

Clearly, my observations must be in the "gradual" period.

Meanwhile, a tree at the edge of the woods in my backyard sports deep purple leaves. I have lived here for more than 20 years. This is a first.

Because of regional variations for foliage development, an old issue was raised for me.

Where, exactly, does the "Northeast Kingdom" begin?

In all my North Country years, I have never received a clear or consistent answer. A bit of research explains why.

The term was coined in a 1949 speech by former Vermont Governor and U.S. Senator George Aiken. He used the term to describe the region's raw beauty.

Several sources state that the "true" point of entry to the Northeast Kingdom remains a friendly debate among Vermonters.

Further research reveals that where the NEK begins depends on whether you define it by legal maps, geographic landmarks, or local culture.

For state tourism boards, maps, and regional planning, the NEK is the realm within Caledonia, Orleans, and Essex

counties. This Tri-County line is the standard political view.

The Geographic View is held by geographers and landscape purists. Here, the NEK boundary is drawn by terrain. For example, the Watershed Divide view states it begins at the main ridge line of the Green Mountains. The Mountain Gateway interpretation states that the high peaks (most notably Jay Peak) mark the western wall of the Kingdom.

In the Cultural View, NewEngland.com notes that "locals and travel writers often argue that the 'Kingdom Vibe' doesn't care about county maps."

Within this View is my favorite, The Shopping Rule. This simply states that the NEK begins in any town where residents choose to drive to Newport or St. Johnsbury for big-ticket shopping rather than travel to Burlington or Montpelier.

By this standard, I live in the Northeast Kingdom.

It is now clearly understandable why it has been impossible for me to receive a clear answer about the NEK for all these years.