

Education and Environmental Proposals
Rep. Cynthia Browning

I have again been assigned to the House Ways and Means Committee, which has oversight of taxes and fees, and any bill affecting the revenues of the state. This first column of the session contains a list of some of the bills that I plan to introduce.

For Education Finance reform I will propose removing the costs of all programs or subsidies that do not directly fund pre-K through 12 education from the Education Fund. This will lower property tax rates.

I hope to introduce a bill that would delay ALL supervisory union re-assignments of school districts for two years. It is unfair that there are districts involved in Act 46 forced district mergers that are also faced with alterations in supervisory union membership. This is the situation with regard to the forced re-assignment of Arlington and Sandgate to the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, which is undergoing a forced merger member districts. It makes no sense to impose change upon change – hit the pause button.

I will introduce a bill that bans both strikes by teachers and lockouts by school boards for our public schools. Either situation hurts the education of Vermont students. The duties of the teachers union and the school boards pull them in different directions. But the interests of students should come first, and teacher contract negotiations should be conducted without hurting them.

Tax provisions that subsidize air and water pollution must be reformed. There are tax deductions and exemptions for the use of polluting substances that mean, in effect, that all Vermont taxpayers are subsidizing their use. If such subsidies are reduced or removed, those substances are more expensive, and the amount used will be less, resulting in less pollution.

I support a bill that would establish a private right of action for medical monitoring damages due to exposure to a toxic substance. The intent is to ensure that should some situation like what has happened with PFOA ever occur again there will be a way for those exposed to get coverage of medical monitoring costs from the entities responsible. Rep. Linda Joy Sullivan of Dorset has taken the lead in developing this new and improved version to replace one that did not make it into law last year.

To reduce plastic pollution of rivers and lakes and to support re-use and recycling I will be introducing a bill to expand the beverage container deposit-redemption system to include water bottles, wine bottles, sodas, and other beverages. The only exceptions would be dairy products, cereal-based “milk” products, and juices. It makes sense to hold the producers of these additional beverages responsible for taking containers back and recycling them, and to have those who purchase the beverages also share the cost. Our current recycling system puts that cost on municipal property tax payers.

Cynthia Browning represents Arlington, Manchester, Sandgate, and part of Sunderland in the Vermont House.