

Creative Common Sense

By Rep. Cynthia Browning

When the new Legislative session starts in January it is not clear what the condition of either the COVID pandemic or the economic recession will be. The Legislature may face great difficulty in financing the support that Vermonters need now and in making investments required for future prosperity. We must make sure that all Vermonters have food, shelter, and health care, and that children can learn. We must make sure that training and child care are available to workers. We must make sure that businesses have support. We must make investments in affordable housing, extensions of Broadband coverage, and energy efficiency. To do these things I believe that we will need to revise the spending priorities of the budget and I believe we will need to issue special Vermont Renewal Bonds to finance necessary investments and to support economic activity.

I can work effectively to make sure that we achieve these shared goals. I know the needs of our communities. I have served on House committees that oversee state investments and that oversee the tax system. I have a working knowledge of the budget. Knowledge is the basis of creativity, and we need creative problem solving grounded in common sense. I also know how to push for changes behind the scenes and how to draft amendments to push for changes publicly. The other candidates will inevitably be more dependent on what they are told by Legislative leadership as they do not have such knowledge or experience.

Some of the Legislative leaders who have endorsed my opponents have been in positions of power for over a decade. These leaders bear considerable responsibility for our lack of progress in solving the problems of insufficient affordable housing, inadequate Broadband service, rising education property tax rates, and pension systems that are not safe and fully funded. Their policies tend to be based on politics, special interests, ideology, and wishful thinking, rather than on common sense reality. All of these longstanding problems have made the current situation worse for Vermonters. These are the leaders whom the other candidates support.

I will use the problem of rising education property tax rates as an example. These rates are now higher than they should be because for years Legislative leadership has insisted on using money from the Education Fund to cover non-education state program costs that were never approved by local school district voters. This doesn't make sense. But although I have made some progress in forcing a reduction in part of this abuse, overall these leaders have been unwilling to correct it and to undertake education finance reform to reduce the growth in property taxes. They blame school districts for rising costs even as they use education tax dollars for non-education state costs that should be covered in the state General Fund. This is profoundly unfair, it hurts the education of all of our children, and it hurts families and businesses.

What is even worse is that Legislative leadership just pushed through another increase in education property tax rates during the current recession. This is the worst possible thing to do to struggling Vermonters. It doesn't make sense. I voted against this increase and Rep. Kathleen James voted for it. These leaders were unwilling to face the reality of the recession, and Rep. James followed their lead. School costs could have been funded at the same level using eligible Federal Funds and accumulated reserves. Either way there is still a deficit we must deal with in the future. I will fight to be sure that this deficit is covered by the state not the property taxpayers, and I will fight for education finance reform to protect Vermont families and businesses and to protect the education of Vermont's children.

This is just one example, but there are similar failures to face reality in the areas of affordable housing, internet service, and pension liabilities. The leaders to whom the other candidates pledge allegiance must be challenged and pushed to face reality and to solve problems. They must be held accountable, not automatically followed and obeyed.

My promise is: I will face hard realities. This is the only way to make progress solving our problems. My promise is to tell the truth even when it displeases those in positions of power. My promise is always to put what will be best for our district above politics or personal ambition. With my expertise and experience I can

work with others to develop creative, common sense policies that will really work. I ask for one of your two votes to be a strong and independent voice for Arlington, Manchester, Sandgate, and Sunderland in Montpelier.

For more information you can reach me at cbrowning@leg.state.vt.us or 802.375.9019, my website is www.cynthiabrowning.com and Cynthia Browning Reports on Facebook.