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# 2018 TOWN MEETING REPORT

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## Linda Joy Sullivan Vermont House of Representatives

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Bennington-Rutland District: Danby, Dorset, Landgrove, Mount Tabor and Peru

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This has already proven to be a very interesting session in Montpelier and we have much important work ahead of us before we adjourn in early May. We have resolved the marijuana debate that occupied the legislature the last several years and are in the midst of an emotional debate of firearms-related issues. There are some very well-intended legislative proposals that will be put forward in the next several weeks that we are going to need to consider carefully in order to avoid unintended negative consequences. The sentiment to increase our minimum wage has a lot of facial appeal. Some worry, however, about our ability to increase the wage base in an economy in large measure built around smaller family and entrepreneurial businesses. Our economy is unique and we need to make sure our efforts to increase the prosperity of Vermont families is appropriately calibrated. Likewise, who can argue against a proposal designed to change the way we finance education so as to lower property taxes? If education costs remain the same, though, some argue all we will be doing is shifting tax burdens from one form to another. We need to continue to work to make our educational spending more efficient and we have heard proposals from the Administration designed to curb spending. Those proposals, too, could have significant impacts on local school budgets and we need to be careful in how we pare down our spending. All of these education proposals need very careful thought.

I encourage you to reach out to me during and after the session to talk about these and other issues that concern you. My email is: lsullivan@leg.state.vt.us. I also hold constituent meetings throughout the year -- Dorset (1st Saturdays, Dorset Rising 8:30 a.m.), Peru and Landgrove (1st Sundays, JJ Hapgoods 10:30 a.m.), Danby and Mt Tabor (2d Saturdays, Nichols Store 8:30 a.m.), East Dorset (2d Sundays, Wilson House, 11:00 a.m.).



### Legislative Highlights and Events

**Vermont Secretary of Commerce Michael Schirling to Visit District** -- On Monday, March 26, I will be facilitating a discussion I organized involving the Vermont Secretary of Commerce and representatives of the Department of Public Service regarding community economic development and the role of cellphone connectivity and broadband. The meeting will start at 10 am and is being hosted by the Dorset Inn in Dorset Village.

**Building on Last Year's ITV Film Festival** -- I co-sponsored and just last week helped push through our Commerce Committee a bill (H. 854) that will help us develop television and film production in the Region as well as, importantly, to provide career development supports for Vermont residents looking to enter the industry.

**Human Trafficking Bill Passes House** -- my Human Trafficking bill (H. 603), which will provide much needed legal reforms to protect victims of human trafficking unanimously passed the house and is currently before the Senate.

## 2018 Legislative Highlights and Events (Continued)

**Appointment as State of Vermont Director for the National Foundation of Women Legislators** -- My most important job is to help address issues affecting Vermonters regardless of partisan division and politics. I am very proud, then, to have been recently selected to be the State's Director for the National Foundation of Women Legislators -- it is an organization dedicated to bringing legislators together from throughout the country to work together in a bi-partisan way to address some of our country's most important issues as well as to encourage women to participate in government at all levels.

**Economic Development** -- I serve on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee. I co-sponsored and worked closely on H. 620, now before House Appropriations, which charged our Agency of Commerce with proactively marketing our 10 state-owned airports in order to increase airport usage and grow local economies. We are also in committee working on proposals to increase the redevelopment of villages and downtowns through redevelopment tax credits. This effort continues the work I contributed to significantly last year that authorized the expanded use of "TIFs" in order to help finance municipal development. In addition, Governor Scott agrees with us that the shortage of workers in Vermont to fill existing and anticipated job openings is one of the most pressing economic development issue in the state. My Committee is working closely with the Department of Labor, Agency of Education, State Workforce Development Board and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to develop the right strategies to develop the workforce in Vermont.

**Mental Health and Corrections** -- We continue to address very difficult and often inter-related mental health and corrections issues. The uncertainty of Medicaid funding, the pressure on our bonding ability, the uneven movement of individuals within and among these facilities, which has resulted in a critical strain on the emergency departments of our hospitals and inappropriate or inefficient care within our Corrections and Mental Health facilities. Among our more pressing needs are 1) the replacement of the current eight-bed Secure Residential Treatment facility in Middlesex; 2) the future of the Woodside Juvenile

Rehabilitation Center in Essex Junction; 3) providing the number of beds needed at the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital in Berlin; and 4) expanding generally our inpatient capacity within our Mental Health, Corrections and systems.

**Work of the Act 250 Commission** -- The Vermont Digger late last year published a three-part series of articles I wrote on the importance of encouraging smart and sustainable economic development throughout Vermont. The articles (and all of my published op-eds) are published on my website and I encourage you to read them. Importantly I argued that, in the interest of developing economic opportunities for all Vermonters we should consider reforms to our land use law, "Act 250," to better align the encouragement of economic development with the preservation of our cherished and irreplaceable natural and environmental resources. I co-sponsored legislation that proposed some specific but very modest fixes to Act 250. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the legislature will act on this bill. Instead, the House and Senate established an "Act 250 Commission" that will, starting in June of this year, travel throughout the State to study Vermonters' experience with Act 250. I strongly encourage all residents of the Northshire to engage in the discussion we are to have about this important law, to include attending one or more of the Act 250 sessions.

**Clean Water** -- We all recognize the need to restore, protect and preserve the waters of our state. For decades the waters of Vermont have slowly degraded. It will take decades to reverse that trend. The Legislature is working to assist in the coordination of the millions of dollars devoted to hundreds of clean water projects ranging from multi-million dollar sewer or treatment plant upgrades to several-thousand-dollar roadside ditching, crop land set asides, stream buffer easements or farmyard drainage projects. In the current year the Legislature has put aside \$21.9 million in bonded dollars toward these projects. \$23.5 million has been allocated for FY 2019.

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