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Two face off in Bennington Rutland House district race

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By Jim Therrien jtherrien@benningtonbanner.com

DORSET -- Linda Joy Sullivan believes she has the educational background and experience to make her the best choice to replace state Rep. Patti Koline in the Bennington-Rutland House seat.

Sullivan, a Democrat, is opposed for the House seat by Republican Jack Stannard, a longtime Select Board member in Dorset. The district includes the towns of Dorset, Dorset, Danby, Mt. Tabor, Peru and Landgrove.

Sullivan, also of Dorset, said her training includes a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in business administration, a certified public account's license and a master of law degree with a focus on taxation.

She operates a public auditing and forensic accounting practice and has owned a business for the past 30 years.

"I believe that my many years of experience as a business owner and as a CPA and tax professional qualifies me to serve Vermont as a legislator to help address the really complex issues I identified above," Sullivan said. "I know taxes, I know economics; I am trained as an auditor to find waste and abuse and to make sure we have strong financial safeguards."

She added, "I am a business turnaround specialist. I fix problems. Those are the types of qualifications we need to have in the Statehouse. I don't intend to be a wallflower in Montpelier. I will put my training, experience and skills to good use."

Beyond her professional experience, Sullivan said, "I have other qualities and interests that I believe will serve our district well if I am elected. I have a deep compassion for the protection and welfare of children and families."

The candidate said she has demonstrated her commitment in that regard as chairwoman of the Jurisdiction Committee on the Governor's Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs and in closely following legislative progress on issues affecting children.

In addition, Sullivan said she is the co-founder, president and executive director of Building Empowerment By Stopping Trafficking (B.E.S.T.), an anti-human trafficking nonprofit organization, with offices and outreach centers in Miami Dade and Palm Beach counties in Florida, New York City and Dorset.

She said that work involves "working with attorneys and the federal, state and local law enforcement community in connection with numerous individual matters and cases involving human trafficking victims; counseling and providing support services to individual human trafficking victims; recruiting and training pro bono counsel; organizing and leading various public awareness outreach programs; providing human trafficking life coach certification training; serving as forensic expert in litigation, and conducting court-ordered analyses and providing other victim support services."

Commenting on the issues she found most on voters' minds, Sullivan said, "People are really worried about property taxes. I have met people who have lived here their whole lives who are afraid that they will have to sell their homes simply because their taxes have become too high. That's just wrong.

"We really need to take a much harder look at all of our revenue sources and expenses," she said, adding, "Addressing high property taxes will be one of my priorities in Montpelier if I am chosen to serve the district."

She termed Act 46, which encourages consolidation agreements among Vermont school districts, as "well intentioned," adding, "Good intentions and wise policy cannot substitute for permitting both our Act 46 committees and our parents to make informed and careful choices for our children. Ending choice for parents of children in tuition towns is fundamentally unfair."

On the all-payer health insurance proposal put forth by the Shumlin administration, she said, "Adopting innovative value-based payment models seems to me to be a generally sensible approach. However, I am concerned that the model Governor Shumlin has just constructed, the so-called All Payer model, remains -- because of its reliance on a single, economically driven provider network to effectively control the care delivery system - largely experimental and may put at risk the ability of Vermonters readily to access our doctors."

Sullivan called for vigilance while the all-payer model is considered in Montpelier, saying, "The provider organization created by the All-Payer model has to remain publicly accountable for ensuring not only that Vermonters have ready access to quality healthcare, but that family physicians, hospitals and community providers are all compensated fairly and equitably."

Concerning wind power projects, Sullivan said, "I'm all for green, renewable energy. But I am very concerned that [renewable energy project siting legislation] passed last year doesn't give our towns the ability simply to say no to the economic interests -- sometimes foreign -- that drive major wind turbine projects. I would like to see us this upcoming legislative session revisit the balance between the Public Service Board and our local communities in making those decisions."

She said of economic development: "I like the idea of collaborating with universities and colleges from outside of the state to establish specialized Vermont-based

programs, as well as of significantly enhancing the offerings of our in-state institutions, to not only keep our children home but to help us create technology and innovation hubs that will attract investment -- of dollars and in the creation of a larger trained workforce -- in our state."

Sullivan also serves as a justice of a peace in Dorset.

More information on the candidate can be found at www.lindajoysullivan4vthouse.com.

Stannard could not be reached for comment on the district House race.

Jim Therrien writes for the Bennington Banner and VtDigger.org. He can be reached at 802-447-7567, Ext. 114. @BB_therrien on Twitter.

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