

## Dec 12

A few quick notes:

9% property tax increase?? You may have heard the VT Tax Dept has forecast a property tax increase of 9%. The annual December forecast is for the purpose of school districts preparing their budgets. But don't panic yet.

This is a projected amount based on revenue estimates from August, but actual revenues have exceeded those estimates significantly. The pandemic has introduced a great deal of uncertainty. But the Legislature, and chair of the tax committee (Ways and Means) in particular, has pledged NOT to load the cost of the pandemic (i.e., due to lower receipts from other taxes) onto property taxpayers. And Congress still might pass another relief bill. In short, we have a challenge ahead of us, but again, don't panic yet.

Another challenge looms with the State College system. The preliminary report from the consultant, delivered Dec. 4, recommended a State investment next year of \$72.5 million, an increase of \$42.5m. Recalling that Vermont's spending on higher ed has been about half of other States', this increase could be considered making up for years of underfunding. I don't know how we will meet this challenge, but I, along with all the NEK delegation and I expect the great majority of legislators, am committed to a viable, sustainable VSCS with all campuses remaining open.

Fine-tuning continues of relief and recovery grants from the Federal Coronavirus Relief Funds. Lodging and hospitality businesses are due to receive about half of an additional \$150m, with other businesses receiving the balance, by the end of the month. This will help keep businesses open and employees paid a little longer while we hope and pray for Congress to act. Glimmers of flexibility are also beginning to appear about the Dec. 30 dead to spend CRF monies; if supply-chain issues prevent completing an otherwise eligible project, the deadline may be extended. More to come on that.

The Climate Council has formed, as prescribed by the Global Warming Solutions Act passed over Governor Scott's veto in September. The Governor still is threatening suit over his concerns for its constitutionality; see VTDigger article Nov. 20, and my commentary in response Nov. 27.

The Councils's fuel dealer representative, appointed by the Speaker, has declined to serve due to the time commitment. Even though most NEK legislators did not support the bill, the entire delegation joined to sign a letter urging the Speaker to choose as replacement someone who will represent our area. Thanks to Rep.-Elect Katherine Sims for organizing the letter.

Congratulations to Kim Behr in St. Johnsbury for her amazing efforts to organize volunteers to sew PPE early in the pandemic. NVRH recognized her at their annual meeting Dec. 1.

Lastly, Catamount Arts continues to find creative ways to bring arts during the pandemic. See online presentations of Natalie McMaster tonight at (Sat. 12/12); Pink Martini Dec. 17; and an 8-hour First Night extravaganza broadcast for free on KATV and streaming online, Dec. 31, 4 PM to midnight.

## Nov 25

## Unemployment benefits saga

I continue to hear reports of hardship dealing with VT Dept of Labor and Unemployment claims. There are a number of non-standard claims that DOL is either completely unable to honor (due to explicit Federal rules) or is "adjudicating," a lengthy process that has been likened to "guilty until proven innocent."

I know of one St. J constituent still caught in limbo, whose case (along with others in a similar predicament) likely will require legislative action when we're back in session in January. If you are another, please let me know.

## BEWARE OF SCAM

There are unscrupulous people preying upon the anxiety and misery of others. Here is a scam email I learned about this morning (11/24).

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**SCAM SCAM SCAM**  
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From: **Hao Ran Xia** <[978269@learn.vsb.bc.ca](mailto:978269@learn.vsb.bc.ca)>  
Date: Mon, Nov 23, 2020 at 5:54 PM  
Subject: COVID-19 Benefits  
To: Hao Ran Xia <[978269@learn.vsb.bc.ca](mailto:978269@learn.vsb.bc.ca)>

In response to the current hardship in the community because of the global COVID-19 outbreak, The Department of Labor has decided to support all workers to get through these hard times.

The Department of Labor will pay \$3,750 to all eligible workers, as Covid-19 Benefits and Compensation, starting from today, **Monday, November 23, 2020**.

Visit the [COVID-19 Benefits](#) page and register with your information to apply for this benefit.

\*Note: ID Verification is required. Your application will not be processed if your ID cannot be verified.

Sincerely,

**COVID-19 Support Team**  
Vermont Department of Labor  
5 Green Mountain Drive  
Montpelier, 0560

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**SCAM SCAM SCAM**  
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As always NEVER click on a link in an email that you are not expecting. Always check the email address it came from (in this case, an obviously fishy address), and if in any doubt contact the sender separately — not by replying to the fishy email.

Be careful, stay safe, stay healthy, and have the best Thanksgiving you can under the circumstances.

## Nov 20

After a hiatus for the election and a short break, here's the latest.

COVID's alarming surge has led Governor Scott to reimpose dismaying restrictions. Travel both outside and within Vermont for "nonessential" travel requires quarantine for 14 days; quarantine can end sooner if you have no symptoms and test negative on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

"Essential" travel means "travel for personal safety, health care, care of others, [parental shared custody](#), for food, beverage or medicine, for students who commute daily to attend preK-12 school or college or a school-sponsored activity, or for work."

As we are near a State border, travel to New Hampshire is allowed without quarantine for those who regularly need to go there for work, health care, school attendance, groceries, and parental shared custody. See full description here: <https://apps.health.vermont.gov/COVID/faq/#4637>.

No doubt you have heard that the Governor also banned social gatherings with other households. Obviously this is very difficult with Thanksgiving next week and the holidays next month. (Note there is an exception for gathering with a single-person household.)

The Health Department's reading of the data shows that such gatherings, such as Halloween parties and sporting events, appear to have led to spikes in cases around the State. This is why gatherings are banned but businesses like restaurants, gyms and salons are allowed to remain open (under restrictions). The Governor made his case at his press conference Nov. 17: <https://governor.vermont.gov/governor-scotts-blog/transcript-governor-phil-scott-addresses-record-covid-19-case-growth>

Travel restrictions continue to hit businesses and workers hard. The Legislature's Joint Fiscal Committee has been meeting to fine-tune distribution of the Federal Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to best cushion the blow. Working with the Administration, JFC on Nov. 14 targeted additional funding to the Accommodations and Food Service industry, and increased relief to all businesses. Details at: <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19>.

JFC will continue to meet to ensure the best use of the money, though all acknowledge it's impossible to allocate these moneys perfectly; they are doing the very best they can. Additional Federal support will be needed for what looks like a very tough winter.

On the broadband front, two groups have been awarded funding to expand service throughout the NEK including St. Johnsbury: fiber-optic cable in northwest and wireless in north-central. They are racing the calendar to get work done ahead of the restrictive CRF deadline on Dec. 30. Map of current awards: <https://vtpsd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=707608bfd86b450caa1a0383f2b56155>

House Rules Committee has been meeting to determine how the House of Representatives and its committees will meet next session. Work will most likely continue to be done remotely, though preparations are being made in case a hybrid approach, part remote and part in-person, becomes possible. However the Legislature will have to meet in person the first day (Jan. 6), expected to be in Barre Auditorium, to elect a Speaker and adopt rules that allow remote sessions, among other formal business.

### October 27

One week left until the General Election. Here are a couple of last-minute tips.

It's TOO LATE TO MAIL your ballot. You have two options left:

Option 1: Drop off your ballot at Town Clerk's office (in St. Johnsbury, drop box outside Town Clerk office doors, to right of main Welcome Center entrance). Fill out the ballot; place it in the inner ballot envelope; FILL OUT AND SIGN the envelope; AND put the ballot envelope INSIDE THE OUTER ENVELOPE which has the Town Clerk's address on it. Seal both envelopes before dropping into the drop box.

Option 2: Vote in person. If you received a ballot by mail, BRING IT TO THE POLLS to avoid confusion and avoid having to sign an affidavit that you have not already voted. You can save time by filling out the ballot in advance; after checking in at the polls, you can place your ballot directly into the voting machine.

If you never received a ballot, call the Town Clerk (St. Johnsbury, 748-4331, ext 1) to see if you are registered. If not, you can register in advance, following the Clerk's instructions, or at the polls, though that might take more time.

Remember, voting is both a privilege and a duty of citizenship. All of us are affected by the work of our political representatives. Don't let someone else decide who those representatives will be!

### October 17

Two recent developments of interest to all Vermonters:

The Public Service Department has finalized its Temporary Broadband Assistance grant program for residents needing internet for remote work, distance learning, or telehealth. It offers up to \$40 per month for monthly internet subscription costs from March to December 2020. See <https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/vermont-temporary-broadband-subsidy-program> for info.

Vermont State College system is offering free job-training courses to Vermonters whose employment been cut or reduced. Most are online but some are in-person or hybrid. See <https://vtworkers.vsc.edu/> for info.

Voting information for St. Johnsbury voters:

By now all active registered voters in St. Johnsbury should have received a by-mail ballot. Here are answers to questions I am hearing from folks.

The General Election ballot instructions are quite clear. However if you have questions, see detailed instructions from the League of Women Voters which I've posted at [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com).

The by-mail ballot includes a postage-paid return envelope, so anyone who wants to vote but cannot or does not want to go to the polls on Nov. 3 can still easily vote. Instructions say to put it in the mail by Monday, Oct. 26; I suggest by Oct. 23 is even safer.

You can also return the ballot to the Town Clerk's office directly. After hours use the mail slot in the office door on the sidewalk to the right of the main Welcome Center entrance.

If you did not receive a ballot, call the Town Clerk, Stacy Jewell, 748-4331, ext. 1. About 200 ballots were returned to the Clerk in St. J due to incomplete addresses or people having moved.

You can register in person at the Town Clerk's office, on online at [olvr.vermont.gov](http://olvr.vermont.gov) by Friday, Oct. 30, or at the polls on Nov. 3.

If you wish to vote in person at the polls (8:00 AM to 7:00 PM, Welcome Center), bring your by-mail ballot. After being checked off by the attendant, you can put your ballot directly into the tabulating machine. If you do not bring your ballot, you will have to sign an affidavit swearing you have not voted elsewhere.

Town Clerk Jewell says they are receiving 100+ ballots per day. You can check to see whether your ballot has been logged as received at [mvp.vermont.gov](http://mvp.vermont.gov).

Counting ballots (putting completed ballots through the tabulation machine) can only be done while members of the Board of Civil Authority are present. A meeting of the BCA is scheduled for Oct. 22 to begin processing ballots already received. I expect, though did not confirm, there will be another pre-election tabulation in order to avoid having a backlog on Nov. 3.

## October 8

The Governor has acted on several bills passed as the session drew to a close. Some highlights:

- Cannabis Tax & Regulate (S.54) the Gov let become law without his signature, saying he believes more work needs to be done. The 108-page bill sets up the legal structure for cannabis (marijuana) production, regulation, and sales. Of note: Municipalities must opt-in to allow retail sales; saliva tests permitted but under warrant and not at roadside, police to receive training to detect impairment and a network of specialized Drug Recognition Experts is to be set up. I supported the bill, not to promote cannabis use, but to end a failed policy of prohibition, and to improve user health and safety by regulating quality and potency.
- The Gov signed another bill (S.234) that provides for expungement from a person's record of cannabis convictions that are no longer illegal. (Passed nearly unanimously.)
- Police Use-of-Force Standard (S.119) the Gov also allowed to become law without signature, saying he thought the bill hastily crafted. It updates 200-year-old statute with specific and uniform statewide standards. Use of force must be "objectively reasonable, necessary, and proportional," and take into account the "totality of circumstances" not just an immediate provocation (for example, a person in extreme mental distress and striking out at an officer should not be met with deadly force). Passed the House 106-37, and I supported as an important step to giving both citizens and police more clarity about expectations and limits.
- The Gov signed two related bills mentioned in my last post. One (S.124) amends law enforcement statute, including policy on mental health issues, facial-recognition, body cameras and military equipment. The other (S.24) promotes racial equity and a "human-services approach" in corrections. (Both passed nearly unanimously.)

- Act 250 Reform (H.926), was vetoed by the Gov, saying it was not comprehensive enough. True, much was lost once the bill got to the Senate, due to limitations imposed by covid. But the bill still addressed two important areas, recreational trails and forest fragmentation. On trails, Agency of Natural Resources and Act 250 jurisdiction would have been limited to trails only and not to the remainder of the parcel where a trail is located. This is an especially important provision for Kingdom Trails, among others. The Gov's reasoning for not supporting the two remaining provisions seems strained, given the support by House (93-56), Senate (26-3), and advocates that worked with the Administration on the bill.
- Hazard Pay (S.352), expanding categories of jobs eligible for covid hazard pay, was signed by the Gov. A companion bill (S.353) was further modified by the Senate and including in the budget bill (H.962). Both passed nearly unanimously.

The Governor has about 10 bills left to act on, by my count.

Again, if these or other issues pique your interest, share your thoughts at my weekly meetings (at least through the election): Fridays via Zoom at 4:00 PM, link at [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com); and Saturdays at 8:30 AM at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St. You can always email me at [scott@campbellforvermont.com](mailto:scott@campbellforvermont.com) or call 595-5580. I look forward to talking to you.

#### September 24

The covid-extended 2020 Legislative session is racing to a close. A lot happens fast. Some notable items:

- Budget bill (H.969) is in conference between House and Senate versions. It's the must-pass bill and is expected to be voted on Friday.
- Two bills (S.352, S.353) expand categories of front-line workers eligible for one-time hazard pay to include certain retail-store staff, childcare workers, trash-collectors, traveling nurses and health-care janitorial and food-service staff. S.353 also adjusts Unemployment Insurance benefits. Minor amendments to the bills still must be approved by House and Senate.
- Several bills passed by the House address policing and racial equity issues. One (S.119) updates 200-year-old deadly-force policy and creates uniform standards for police services statewide. Another (S.124) adds policy on mental health issues, facial-recognition, body cameras, and military equipment. Another (S.24) promotes racial equity and a "human-services approach" in corrections. All were amended by the House and are back in Senate.
- Comprehensive Act 250 updates (H.926) passed by the House in February were trimmed by the Senate to address only recreation trails (limits review to only the trails, not surrounding land parcels) and forest habitat (includes consideration of maintenance of forest blocks to Act 250 criteria). Further Senate amendment now in House.
- Cannabis regulation (S.54) passed both House and Senate this week and is on Governor's desk. The 108-page bill sets up Control Board; regulates quality and potency; taxes cannabis sales to fund drug-prevention and education programs; prohibits public consumption unless specifically authorized by law; licenses various types of producers and processors; requires "opt-in" local approval for retail operations; provides for saliva testing for impairment, after roadside assessment (not testing) and obtaining warrant; and includes much other detail.

- The Senate this week joined the House overriding the Governor's veto of the Global Warming Solutions Act (H.688). The bill is now law. Next, House and Senate will appoint 15 members to join 8 Administration agency heads to form the Climate Council, and the Council will get to work on the Climate Action Plan. The Plan will address how to prepare our economy and our infrastructure for a drastically changing climate. It is long overdue.

I will provide further updates next week.

Reminder of my weekly availability at least through the election: Fridays (except this Friday due to the final House meeting — hopefully!) via Zoom at 4:00 PM (see [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com) for link); and Saturdays at 8:30 AM at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St. I also hope to have a table at this Saturday's Get Downtown event in St. Johnsbury, 1:00-4:00 PM. You can always email me at [scott@campbellforvermont.com](mailto:scott@campbellforvermont.com) or call 595-5580. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

### September 10

The House this week nearly unanimously passed a balanced full-year budget for FY21. Diligent work by House committees, especially Appropriations (of course), preserves current State government services, by judicious use of federal Coronavirus Relief Funds and higher-than-expected FY20 revenues received after June 30. This was a herculean task, compressing what usually takes a 5-month session into 3 weeks.

Some highlights: The bill (H.969) provides full bridge funding for the Vermont State College system, using State revenues and not depending on the possibility of Congressional action to make federal Coronavirus Relief Funds more flexible, as originally proposed by the Administration.

The bill also increases support for childcare; directs relief payments to Vermonters left out of federal programs; and fully funds debt obligations and keeps our reserves full as we approach an expected much more difficult budget next year. It also makes explicit a small (\$586,000) appropriation to support implementation of the Global Warming Solutions Act, which as described in previous FPF posts and a Cal-Rec commentary on 9/11, is fundamental preparation for the looming effects of climate change.

The Global Warming Solutions Act (H.688) itself passed earlier this week on a roll-call vote of 102-45. Governor Scott has been critical of the bill and appears likely to veto it. The greater-than-two-thirds majority votes in both House and Senate suggest the Legislature may override the possible veto. If you have strong feelings one way or the other, contact your Representatives and Senators.

Reminder that I will be available to discuss this or any other issue in-person outdoors on Saturdays at 8:30 AM (9/12, 9/26, and every Saturday in October) at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St, St. J. Also Zoom meetings every Friday at 4:00 PM through Oct. 30; please email me for the link [scott@CampbellForVermont.com](mailto:scott@CampbellForVermont.com). And on Saturday 9/19, I will be joined by area and statewide candidates for a Meet & Greet at the St. Johnsbury Community Pavilion, Almshouse Rd, above the ball field and sand pile.

### September 1

Readers, apologies for the hiatus since last post August 7. I didn't realize FPF had reimposed the 5 post/month limit.

Broadband: The Line Extension Customer Assistance Program, LECAP, is proving frustrating for many. The cable companies (functionally, cable extensions are what can be completed most quickly in our area) are not being very responsive. They are overwhelmed, and they have to triage what they have time and budget for (LECAP funds up to \$3000 of the customer's share of costs, but the company still must fund costs as well). No excuse, but just reality.

See 8/7 post at [CampbellForVermont.com](https://www.campbellforvermont.com) for more details. LECAP was never going to help very many people primarily due to the Coronavirus Relief Fund's 12/31/20 deadline. While any Federal money helps, that deadline has undercut much of the good it could have done.

Housing: The end of the Federal \$600 additional to unemployment assistance has put many households back in crisis. There are several links to help on my website, but here is a good summary from Vermont Legal Aid: <https://www.campbellforvermont.com/s/VT-Legal-Aid-re-housing-2020-08-19.pdf>

Budget: Legislature is back in session to pass the revised full-year budget for FY21 (through 6/30/21), and also to rebalance the CRF. This is a huge undertaking in an extremely tight time frame for every House and Senate committee, but Appropriations chairs Rep. Kitty Toll (who is not seeking re-election) and Sen. Jane Kitcheh, both of Danville, are doing the heavy lifting; please thank them when you see them!

Two public hearings on the budget were held last week; those and all Appropriations Committee meetings can be viewed at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/streaming/house-appropriations>.

Other issues before the Legislature: Besides the budget, a number of bills have gone through the lengthy committee process in both chambers and are ready for a vote. One important one that I have been involved in addresses Vermont's response to the climate crisis, H.688, also known as the Global Warming Solutions Act. I have described it in detail in a past post (2/13) and Caledonian-Record commentary (2/14), and will discuss it again in the coming weeks.

Share your concerns: Covid prevents any opportunity for me to meet you door-to-door to discuss issues. But I am continuing in-person outdoor meetings Saturdays at 8:30 AM (9/12, 9/26, and every Saturday in October) at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St, St. J. Also Zoom meetings every Friday at 4:00 PM through Oct. 30; please email me for the link [scott@CampbellForVermont.com](mailto:scott@CampbellForVermont.com). And on Saturday 9/19, I will be joined by area and statewide candidates for a Meet & Greet at the St. Johnsbury Community Pavilion, Almshouse Rd, above the ball field and sand pile.

August 26 (over limit of 5 posts/month FPF reimposed 8/1, not published)

Readers, apologies for the hiatus since last post August 7. Busy, but not lots this month to update you on locally till now.

Broadband: The Line Extension Customer Assistance Program, LECAP, is proving frustrating for many. The cable companies (functionally, cable extensions are what can be completed most quickly) are not being very responsive. It's likely they are overwhelmed, and if you are farther than about ¼ mile away from their line, the \$3000 subsidy is unlikely to cover your share, so they may assume you won't go for it. No excuse, but just reality.



See 8/7 post at [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com) for more details. LECAP was never going to help very many people primarily due to the Coronavirus Relief Fund's 12/31/20 deadline. While any Federal money helps, that deadline has undercut much of the good it could have done.

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Public Hearings on the budget THIS WEEK: Thurs 8/27, 5:00-6:00 PM; and Fri 8/28 1:00-2:00 PM. Register to make comments: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/links/public-hearing-happ>. Watch hearing: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/streaming/house-appropriations>.

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Share your concerns: Covid prevents any opportunity for me to meet you door-to-door to discuss issues. But I am continuing in-person outdoor meetings Saturdays at 8:30 AM (THIS SAT., 8/29; and 9/12, 9/26, and every Saturday in October) at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St, St. J. Also Zoom meetings every Friday at 4:00 PM through Oct. 30; please email me for the link [scott@CampbellForVermont.com](mailto:scott@CampbellForVermont.com). And on Saturday 9/19, I will be joined by area and statewide candidates for a Meet & Greet at the St. Johnsbury Community Pavilion, Almshouse Rd, above the ball field and sand pile.

## August 7

Broadband: The Public Service Department is rolling out programs in response to the covid crisis that will assist households and businesses with better Internet connectivity. PSD updated Legislative committees on Tuesday. There are 3 programs to mention. The first is the most time-sensitive.

Line Extension program, launched July 28, provides up to \$3000 to offset the customer's share of extending service from where it currently ends to the customer's location. Typically the service involved is cable, and \$3000 covers pretty short distances, ¼ to ½ mile, though a group of customers farther from the end of the line could band together to keep the per-customer cost down.

The important thing here is, in order to apply for the \$3000, you have to find out the line-extension cost from the cable provider, in this area, Charter Spectrum. Getting that cost takes time, and time is very short. Call Spectrum (1-855-243-8892), and check [publicservice.vermont.gov](http://publicservice.vermont.gov) for details.

Broadband Subsidy program, to be launched Aug. 14, provides \$20 per month retroactive to March to "qualifying broadband subscribers" — presumably those who could physically

connect to broadband Internet service but can't afford it. Program launch coincides with start of Utility Arrearage program that will assist customers with past-due utility bills who otherwise would be facing service shutoff.

The third program is Get Vermonters Connected Now, which augments an existing program called Connectivity Initiative. This is a pool of \$12 million to incentivize Internet Service Providers to extend their services farther to serve "last mile" customers. Eligible ISPs include cable, fiber-optic, and fixed-wireless services. As this program is targeted to ISPs, the only thing consumers can do is be sure PSD knows of your need: 800-622-4496.

Beyond that, CRF money is being used to draft a comprehensive covid-response telecom plan; to assist new Communications Union Districts, such as our own NEK Community Broadband, accelerate deployment schedules; to improve state IT systems' cybersecurity for state workers now logging into those systems from home, and also for town officials logging into the systems; and to reimburse local public/education/government public-access cable TV stations for additional expenses incurred to support government, schools and community during the crisis.

Next Phase of Covid Emergency: Expiration of Federal \$600 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance is a big jolt to those who have been relying on it to continue paying the rent or mortgage. While Congress wrangles about the next relief package, many people are threatened with eviction, foreclosure, food insecurity, and loss of their small business.

Vermont still has programs to assist, including as of Aug. 4 Hazard Pay for Front-Line Workers. Resources are too numerous to list here; see [CampbellForVermont.com/news-events](https://CampbellForVermont.com/news-events) for links.

School reopening planning continues to be challenging. A House Education committee hearing last week included testimony from Ed Secretary French, district superintendents, and teachers. With Vermont having the least number of cases in the country, and a high testing and contact-tracing capacity, we are as well positioned as possible to safely reopen schools. This is especially critical for preK-5th grade children. And all recognize the centrality of school reopening to restarting the economy. Still, flexibility and ingenuity will be required. The coming year will likely include in-person, remote and hybrid systems for many of us.

### August 5

Global pandemic. Economic shutdown. Unemployment fiasco.

Importing covid-positive inmates to Northeast Correctional Facility. Threatening to close NVU-Lyndon. Re-starting schools. Reckoning with systemic racism — and sexism.

We live in troubling times, as we prepare for a presidential and statewide election.

Out of respect for you and for my family, I will not be going door-to-door this year to meet with you and learn your views on these and other issues.

Instead I am holding meetings both in-person at an outdoor cafe and via Zoom:

Zoom: Every Friday at least through Oct 30, 4:00-5:00 PM. Email me for the link.

In-Person: August 14 and 29, 8:30-9:30 AM (further dates to be determined), at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St., St. Johnsbury. Please email me so I can prepare tables with proper distancing. And bring a mask!

I look forward to hearing your views.

### August 3

Reminder to return your by-mail ballot for the Primary Election !

In St. Johnsbury as of last Friday, 1254 people have requested ballots, and 606 have returned them. This is out of about 4500 registered voters, and half of the 2500 or so that usually vote, and compares to 700 by-mail ballots in 2018 November General Election.

Turnout is likely to be higher this year. Avoid delays at the polling place (the Welcome Center this Primary Election) due to personal distancing and cleaning between voters.

The Secretary of State's office says, to be sure your Primary ballot arrives in time to be counted, you should get it in the mail by August 3 — that's today. If you haven't requested your ballot, you still can, and you can drop it off at the Town Clerk's office at the Welcome Center.

Thank you for participating in your democratic government.

### July 29

Following up the Coffee Hour meeting announcement yesterday:

For those St. Johnsbury neighbors who cannot join me Saturday — or do not wish to risk in-person meeting — I have set up a Zoom meeting this coming Friday, July 31, from 4:00-5:00 PM, "Tea Time." Please email me for the Zoom link. I am willing to do this weekly at the same day and time if there is interest.

And to clarify, the in-person meetings on Saturdays will be every other Saturday, that is, August 1, 15, and 29, at 8:30 AM at Central Cafe on Railroad St. I'll announce plans for further meetings at the end of the month.

Again, these are not campaign events, but a chance to discuss the many challenges and opportunities facing St. Johnsbury and Vermont, and let me hear your views.

### July 28

St. Johnsbury Neighbors,

You may recall that earlier this year, before the world changed, I was holding coffee hours twice a month. With the Legislature resuming session on August 25, and cafes open again, I am resuming that schedule.

This is NOT a campaign event, but an opportunity to share your thoughts on legislation or any local and state issues you are concerned about.

My plan is to be available every other Saturday morning in August, from 8:30 to about 9:30, starting this coming Saturday, Aug. 1. I expect to continue the schedule through the end of

October, though I may have to adjust based on turnout and other obligations. I will update on FPF and Facebook.

We will meet at an outdoor table at Central Cafe, 418 Railroad St., St. Johnsbury. All are welcome. A quick email letting me know you'll be there will help me set up a table large enough for distancing. Of course, you can always contact me by email, or phone (before 9 PM!) at 595-5580, if Saturdays aren't good for you. I look forward to meeting with or hearing from you.

### July 26

Elections: Vermont's statewide primary is August 11. St. Johnsbury's polls will be open from 10 AM to 7 PM as usual, at the Welcome Center NOT St. Johnsbury School, due to construction. The number of people allowed into the polls at any one time will be restricted, to minimize possible virus exposure. Expect in-person voting to be slow and time-consuming.

Vote by mail if you can. The Secretary of State's office sent all registered voters a pre-paid return card to request a by-mail ballot. If you did not receive it, or misplaced it, call your Town Clerk, in St. Johnsbury, Stacy Jewell, 748-4331, [townclerk@stjvt.com](mailto:townclerk@stjvt.com), or at the Secretary of State's website, [sos.vermont.gov](http://sos.vermont.gov) — but time is short!

If you have your ballot, return it ASAP. In St. J as of 7/24, 1129 voters have already gotten ballots and 404 have returned them. By comparison, in the 2018 General Election, less than 700 voted by mail. St. Johnsbury has about 4500 registered voters; typical turnout is around 2500.

Voting is a right, but it is also a duty. Government isn't some faceless thing "out there" that we have no control over. In our system, government is us. It's up to each of us to learn enough about the issues and the candidates to cast an informed ballot. This election, more than any in memory, will test whether democracy — self-government — can survive the forces arrayed to undermine it, from relentless foreign interference, to social-media echo chambers, to billionaires' undue influence, to voter apathy and indifference.

So, vote like your life depends on it. By-mail ballots are not difficult, but care is necessary. Karen Bufka, League of Women Voters, posted a helpful guide recently on FPF (July 22, issue No. 2420).

Housing: The \$600 per week Federal lifeline for many people who have lost their jobs has ended. For homeowners with a mortgage, and renters and their landlords, this is grim news. The Legislature has directed significant resources from Vermont's allocation of Federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to housing assistance. See VHFA and VSHA links on [CampbellForVermont.com/news-events](http://CampbellForVermont.com/news-events). Links for other vital needs are there too.

Schools: Plans to reopen schools continue to be in serious flux. A colleague forwarded an open letter to the community by the superintendent of Harwood Union district, Brigid Nease. Beyond obvious concerns about infection, the juggling necessary to accommodate in-person, hybrid, and/or all-online teaching, for teachers, staff and parents, seems nearly impossible. "It comes down to workforce and child care issues that cannot be solved at the local level."

After a lengthy discussion of problems and efforts to solve them, Superintendent Nease goes on to say: "... School districts across the state all have published plans that they cannot guarantee they can staff, and even if by some miracle one can, it is highly unlikely they will be able to sustain it. Childcare for all families AND school employees is a huge problem that

crosses many district geographical boundaries. This is a significant statewide problem in need of a significant statewide solution made by those that have the authority to do so, at the top of the food chain, not individual community administrators and local school boards...." (Full letter at [https://huusd.org/Superintendents%20Letter%20to%20the%20Community%207\\_25\\_20.html](https://huusd.org/Superintendents%20Letter%20to%20the%20Community%207_25_20.html))

Of course, this is one person's view, albeit highly informed. There were worries about child care opening several weeks ago too, yet that seems to have gone pretty well. Local situations will vary, perhaps widely; out-of-state college students may bring high rates of infection to college towns. We will have to see what happens, and adjust, as we have been since March.

If you're interested, House Education is holding a hearing on Thursday, July 30, at 2 PM. Watch it at the House Ed webpage <https://legislature.vermont.gov>, click on Committees in menu across the top of the screen, select Education in the list of House Committees, and look for "Live Stream" link.

### July 15

The Legislature, which normally adjourns for the year in mid-May, recessed June 26 after passing a part-year budget and vital Coronavirus Relief Fund appropriations. We will reconvene Aug. 25 to finalize the full-year budget and consider some important policy bills.

Completing legislation authorizing CRF expenditures was an enormous task. I have posted the Joint Fiscal Office's summary and a link to the State Auditor's summary at [CampbellForVermont.com/news-events](http://CampbellForVermont.com/news-events). Also posted there are links for individuals and businesses to access information and apply for assistance.

That was all a reminder of where I left off my last Local Update post, as I have taken most of the last two weeks off to "staycation" with family.

Other part-time citizen legislators haven't been as lucky. Committee chairs of Appropriations, Human Services, Commerce, Education and others have been meeting with officials and monitoring the roll out of CRF programs.

The hot topic currently is school reopening. Teachers, staff, and parents are understandably anxious about not only the risks but the logistics of implementing the Agency of Education's plans for safely reopening. What if a student's household includes vulnerable person (elderly or pre-existing condition)? What if a student refuses to wear a mask? There are only a few weeks to settle people's minds about pressing questions.

Teachers' union requests for a commission including front-line teachers have not been met. However, union representatives have been included in AOE's process. From here, I can't tell whether this will be adequate. There isn't time now to restart the process, but I certainly hope and expect the implementation phase will include plenty of opportunity for teacher and staff feedback and procedural adjustment.

Overall, the emergency transition to remote classes in March and April was anything but smooth. It appears that most students fell behind, and perhaps a third of students did not attend at all. The lack of broadband internet is likely a big factor here, and while some progress will be made on that front in the next few months, it's a longer term problem. So the need to return to in-person classes is great.

At the same time, plans must be in place in case covid infections spike, as it is happening now in many other parts of the country. Schools would have to pivot immediately to remote classrooms. With more time and experience, and more broadband access, the hope is results will be better. Integrating occasional remote classes into standard curriculum could improve matters as well. Snow days and covid shutdowns would still be disruptive for parents, but at least the school calendar wouldn't be affected. Students (at least) could look forward to getting out for summer vacation on time.

Vermont's rigorous response to the pandemic has kept health impacts blessedly mild, but the economic impacts have been severe. All expectations are we are facing a generalized recession that could last a year or more. Life will continue to be difficult for many people. The Legislature will continue to work with the Administration to do everything possible to cushion the economy while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Key to reducing economic damage is keeping covid at bay. What we all can do is continue to be vigilant about personal distancing, quarantining travelers, and wearing masks in public — for our own safety, the safety of vulnerable loved ones, and the health of our community and economy.

### June 29

The Legislature wrapped up the major part of our 2020 session on Friday. We will reconvene on Aug. 25 to pass the final FY21 budget plus a few important policy bills.

What did we accomplish, in this strange remote-meeting year?

We passed an FY20 budget adjustment that ended the year (June 30) in balance. We passed a Quarter 1 FY21 budget to fund government until a full revenue forecast becomes available in mid-August. We took testimony and filled in the details in the Governor's outline recommendations for spending all but about \$140 million of the \$1.25 billion in Coronavirus Relief Fund from the Federal government.

Allocating the CRF money was a huge undertaking. Normally most of Vermont's \$6 billion budget is locked from year to year — significant changes in spending are heavy lifts requiring months of preparation and testimony to craft agreement. With CRF, all that work took place in 8 weeks from Vermont receiving the money, and only 5 weeks from the Administration issuing its outline recommendations. This is not to brag, just to give residents an idea of the scale of work involved. Policy and budget committees, and in particular Legislative Council and the Joint Fiscal Office (nonpartisan offices that function as legislative staff, since legislators do not have their own staff), worked overtime to get this vital money out the door and into Vermonters' hands as quickly as possible.

Where the CRF money is going is too long and complicated to describe here. I will post details on [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com) in the coming days. I will say that, within the tight confines of Fed requirements, we worked to support the breadth of the economy: health care; businesses; pre-K to higher ed; hazard pay; broadband; food system; local government; housing; arts; and more.

Other bills of note passed this week and sent to the Governor —

- Racial Bias and Use of Force in Policing (S.219). Prohibits certain restraints (e.g., chokeholds) unless deadly force is required; collects data relevant to racial profiling;

mandates body cameras for state police. Passed House on unanimous roll call vote and Senate concurred.

- Workers Comp for Covid-19 (S.342). Ensures that front-line workers disabled by covid, and non-front-line workers exposed to covid at work, are eligible for workers comp. Despite opposition by the insurance industry and some business groups, this protects businesses by avoiding impacts to a business's health insurance plan, if it has one. It also has obvious benefits for workers. Passed House 93-20 on voice vote and Senate concurred.
- Capital Bill (H.955). Funds long-planned capital projects including full funding of the State's portion of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. Especially important after the economic hit of the shutdown, these projects stimulate construction activity. House concurred with Senate 118-1 on voice vote.
- Miscellaneous Health Bill (H.960). Promotes integration of mental health services into Vermont's overall medical care system; streamlines prior-authorization procedures that are allowed to be used by insurance companies. House concurred with Senate on 134-1 voice vote.

When we return in August I expect we will finally pass the Global Warming Solutions Act (H.688), which despite the title actually just sets the stage for how Vermont will adjust our economy to cope with the climate crisis. It passed the House earlier this year 105-37, and on Friday passed the Senate, with minor amendments, 23-5.

### June 19

Much action on the House floor this week as we near the end of the session — until August, at least. We heard presentations and debate, and passed with only one dissenting vote, distribution of \$533 million from the Federal Coronavirus Relief Fund.

This money was in two bills, H.965 and H.966, that offer significant support for businesses, housing, broadband, and individuals. This brings the total CRF funds allocated so far to over \$800 million out of \$1.25 billion. Most of the remaining, except for a reserve to be held until the August session, will be allocated next week.

Needless to say, the detail behind these allocations is extremely complicated. As I sort it out, I will provide what I hope will be useful summaries in upcoming posts.

Most important, as application procedures are developed, I will post information about those as well.

We also passed several policy and technical bills. Two worthy of note:

- Older Vermonters Act (H.611) sets out a "bill of rights" for older Vermonters based on self-determination; safety and protection; financial security; health; social engagement; housing and transportation; and family support. The bill codifies coordination of services in State government and community organizations such as Area Agencies on Aging. It requires reports to track progress, and a rate study to assess how to bring Medicaid reimbursement rates in line with services. The bill is now in the Senate.
- An Act relating to Duration of Temporary Relief-from-Abuse Orders (H.962). Current law requires a defendant (alleged abuser) to appear at a court hearing held within 14 days of issuance of a temporary relief-from-abuse order. If the defendant fails to show, he/she can

effectively cause the order to expire. This bill keeps the temporary order in effect until resolution by the court. Now in the Senate.

The Senate Natural Resources and Energy committee made minor amendments and passed on to the floor the Global Warming Solutions Act (H.688). This bill is a comprehensive response to the climate crisis, requiring reductions in emissions and strengthening resilience to mitigate the effects of the rapidly changing climate on Vermont's economy. I went into some detail in my post of February 23, which you can access on [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com).

## June 14

Legislative leadership hopes to wrap the session by June 26, though that depends on the length of debate over the final must-pass bills. This is more than a month later than usual, of course, due to the covid crisis.

Friday 6/12 the House passed the first of a series of bills targeting crisis relief using the \$1.25 billion Federal Coronavirus Relief Fund allocated to Vermont. (CRF money already authorized includes ~\$40 million in final budget adjustment for FY20, which ends 6/30/20, and ~\$48 million passed in first-quarter FY21 budget.)

The bill (S.350) provided \$70 million in Economic Recovery Grants (not loans) for businesses devastated by the public health shutdown, plus \$23 million towards permanent housing for the homeless, who can no longer be served through homeless shelters, totaling \$93 million. It passed nearly unanimously. A second bill should be completed late this week.

Link for businesses to prepare to apply for these grants: <https://tax.vermont.gov/coronavirus#relief>

There's been some criticism of the Legislature's "delay" appropriating CRF funds. It's important to recognize the strict and evolving parameters for this money. Broadly, it cannot be used to fill budget holes or replace lost revenues; it must be for expenses directly related to the covid crisis; and it must be spent and work completed by December 30, 2020.

The appropriations process normally involves hearings before policy committees, presentations and vetting by Appropriations committees, and debate on the floor — for both House and Senate. It is designed to be a slow, deliberative process, to allow many voices and viewpoints to be heard, and to avoid hasty decisions that might later be regretted.

The CARES Act, which provided the CRF, was signed into law 3/27/20. Vermont received its allocation 4/27. The Administration presented its first conceptual recommendations (not in legislative bill form) on 5/20. Some of those recommendations may not meet the CRF restrictions, some included loans, which for businesses on the edge of solvency are not helpful.

The House and Senate did its work and passed this first set of grants 3½ weeks after the Administration's recommendations — while working less efficiently via Zoom. The CRF is a lot of money to move in an extremely short time, while adhering to tight rules to avoid the Fed's disallowing costs after the money's been spent.

An upcoming bill will include recommendations from my committee, Energy & Technology, for \$43.2 million of CRF spending. Those recommendations target broadband deployment; assistance with past-due utility bills (including telecom) for customers facing shutoff due to the crisis; cybersecurity for State networks now being accessed by State employees working



remotely; increased IT expenses dealing with the Unemployment system; and a few other issues.

Also passed on Friday was a bill (S.348) authorizing the Secretary of State to proceed with the plan to mail ballots to all voters for the 2020 general election (only), without requiring the Governor's agreement. Governor Scott has indicated that he is fine with the change.

Lastly, I would like to agree with those seeking to avoid the partisan rancor characteristic of other social media (one in particular, on which I have a page only reluctantly). I suggest that rancor is different from a respectful discussion of political issues, which is my intention on FPF and which I will be even more alert to observing in the future.

I do believe voting is a duty as well as a right, and becoming informed about political issues of the day is necessary to exercise that duty/right responsibly. Topics like racism and use-of-force by police are legitimate topics of discussion — indeed, vital for our growth as a community, State and nation. We must build a consensus that hate and violence are not to be tolerated in our society. Silence is all that is needed for that consensus to break down.

In that vein, when you have 28 minutes to be knocked off your feet, watch this interview with Senator Cory Booker on Stephen Colbert: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ayizzcv-NCE>

## June 6

Last week, a young woman, a 2015 graduate of St. Johnsbury Academy and Peace Corps volunteer recently evacuated from Senegal, West Africa, emailed me. She is white, but was deeply disturbed by the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. She wanted to rally the public around racial justice. She planned to use her skills as a graphic artist to create a sign people could post showing their support.

I was impressed with her sincerity and wanted to support her effort. I suggested a press event, she agreed, and I emailed about 40 local institutional leaders, with an emphasis on police, corrections and the local prosecutor. I didn't think to start with the community of color, in particular Sha'an Mouliert, a local leader I knew of but did not know personally.

A number of people called me on that oversight the very next day. Late that afternoon, following House floor and committee Zoom meetings, I had a long phone call with Ms Mouliert and the young woman who started it all.

Racism infects all of us, whether we're aware of it or not. I fancy myself pretty aware and conscious of countering it. I am myself one-quarter Korean, and though I was raised on the "white side of the tracks," I have realized since I was young that if I were one-quarter Kenyan, say, I would be "black": a difference of merely a few letters, whether of the alphabet or the genome.

Yet I, a woke white(-ish) man, missed the obvious.

Would it be best to call on a man to lead a women's march? or a straight person to lead a LGBT demonstration? No. The young SJA alum decided to step back, and she and I cancelled the press event.

It's true that racism dehumanizes both parties, oppressor and oppressed. And that, I think, is where the young woman's activism sprang from: White people, reform yourselves. In itself, it's

an honorable motivation. But if racism is a character flaw for white people, it's a life sentence for black people. The experiences are not comparable.

The ways in which racism is an ignoble founding principle of America, and has been woven into the fabric of our society ever since, would take hours — years — to recount. But briefly: citizenship originally stipulating "white men;" Jim Crow laws restoring slavery in all but name; lynchings; miscegenation statutes outlawing "mixed marriages;" redlining by realtors and bankers, keeping blacks out of "white areas," and further skewing the accumulation of wealth away from blacks. "Driving while black" sounds funny but it's not a joke: blacks are 12% of U.S. population but over 36% of inmates. And on and on (and admittedly missing even more profound markers).

It's got to stop. And we — all of us — have got to stop it.

Most important, by remaining stuck in oppression and resistance, our society misses celebrating all the ways African American culture immeasurably enriches America and the world. More's the pity.

I have no illusions that Mr. Floyd's murder, or the widespread reaction to it, will spell the end of racists and racism. But I hope that, like the naming of sexual predators in high places and the "me too" movement, we may advance another painful step toward recognizing structural wrongs, and our personal complicity in them.

### May 30

I mentioned last week that the pace of legislative activity is picking up, in spite of the inefficiencies of remote meetings.

One of those inefficiencies is "voice" voting, which we conduct by computer app rather than 150 voices over Zoom. The clerk sends a notification and tallies members' responses, even though the vote is recorded only as "concurring" or "not concurring." Tallies noted here for voice votes therefore are not official.

The House virtual floor was busy this week with several must-pass "money" bills. The final FY20 Budget Adjustment (H.953), as amended by the Senate, was passed by unanimous voice vote and sent to the Governor. Capital Bill (H.955) was passed by voice, 140-2, and sent to the Senate, where it has already been sent to committee. Transportation Bill (H.942) was passed unanimously by roll call and sent to the Senate.

"Yield" Bill (statewide property tax rates for Education Fund; H.959) aroused some debate. The Ways & Means Committee was determined not to raise property taxes next year to replace lost revenues caused by the pandemic. So the rates set are to fund school budgets as passed on Town Meeting Day (a few towns still must pass budgets), even though that means a deficit. Several mechanisms for dealing with the deficit over the next 5 years are included in the bill. Local boards will certainly be alert to trimming expenses where possible regardless of the budget passed before the crisis. In effect, the bill allows towns to send out property tax bills on schedule this summer and fall. It passed by roll call, 127-20, and was sent to the Senate.

In Energy & Technology Committee this week, we took considerable testimony on, amended, and passed to the floor S.301, a bill which addresses two things: (1) reauthorizing expedited permitting for telecom facilities under 30 V.S.A. § 248a, which otherwise would sunset 6/30/20; and (2) amending a provision in last year's Act 79 requiring cell and VoIP phone service

providers to notify E911 when service outages occur, similar to telephone provider notification requirements.

The first item, 248a, is especially important now as we seek to accelerate broadband deployment. It has been in effect since 2007 and has been reauthorized on 3-year cycles four times (first reauthorization was 1 year). Industry lobbyists requested removing the sunset altogether; Senate opted for 5-year term; our committee returned to 3-year term, since the industry is in a period of rapid innovation and change.

The second item, E911 notification, provoked lots of response from telecom providers, which for the most part are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, preempting State regulation. FCC has a similar notification requirement, but the threshold, in number of users and length of outage, is many times higher than Vermont's requirement for telephone service providers.

The purpose of notification is "situational awareness" for 911 dispatch centers and emergency personnel. The E911 Board, as directed in Act 79, has already conducted a public rule-making process to establish a threshold which is lower than FCC's. As part of routine legislative review of rules, a relatively minor glitch turned up, which required amending statute.

In my view, telecom providers saw this as an opportunity to use the Legislature to bypass the E911 Board. The version passed by our committee took out the Senate's provision that would have required the Board to use the FCC threshold instead what they developed through their rule-making process.

Next week my committee returns focus to broadband deployment short- and long-term, and to first-quarter FY21 budget items in our policy area. The Legislature must pass a Q1-FY21 budget before June 30. We will return to finalize the rest of FY21 budget in August or September, when more is understood about the fiscal fallout from the pandemic.

## May 22

Before I entered the Legislature, my perception was that the process seemed horribly inefficient: talk all day and nothing ever happens.

Once I became a Rep I found out that in fact the days in the Statehouse are packed. Committee hearings are like college seminars, dense with information from topic experts. Floor debates are often intense. Informal conversations fill the gaps in between and are sometimes most important of all.

Well, after several weeks of remote committee hearings and floor votes, I have a much better notion of inefficient. Voice votes that would take 1 minute in person take 10 minutes online.

However, the pace of activity is picking up. We are still working primarily on covid-related bills, but some generally non-controversial bills that committees worked long and hard on are now being brought up. All have passed on nearly unanimous votes.

All except one that became surprisingly controversial Wednesday. The bill updates century-old law regarding town tree wardens. The original version generated a lot of opposition, as it seemed to require a public process for removing nearly any tree. But House Ag & Forestry took a lot of testimony and overhauled the bill. Most who opposed the original version now approve the revised, including town managers and VT League of Cities & Towns.

Rep. Brian Smith, of Derby, requested a roll-call vote, which typically is requested if a bill is controversial, or if members wish to demonstrate wide support. In this case, it appeared the Republican caucus decided to oppose the bill. Most voted no, though I counted at least a dozen Republicans who voted yes, as well as half a dozen Democrats who voted no. Final tally: 114 yes, 32 no. Perhaps this is a sign of normalcy beginning to return in yet another way.

Today (Friday, 5/22), we took up adjustments to the Capital Bill, which lays out long-term investments on State properties. Capital bills are on a two-year basis; the current cycle covers FY20 and FY21 (July 19 - June 21). The adjustments bill received near-unanimous preliminary approval and is expected to pass next week.

The great news for us locally is that LVRT funding was included, and the plan now is for construction to be completed in 2 years rather than 4. The extension into downtown St. J, along with the summer shelter, is underway now and due to be completed soon.

My committee, Energy & Technology, continues to work on strategies to accelerate broadband rollout. Federal Covid Relief Fund money may be available to fund broadband access for education and telemedicine purposes. We are taking more testimony from Public Service Dept., telecoms, electric utilities and communications union districts to map out precisely what projects can be done quickly when and if authorization to use that money is forthcoming.

You can assist the broadband effort. If you have little or no connectivity — whether because there is no way to access or the price is too high — and you have students in the house, please contact your school to be sure they are aware. Likewise if you have medical needs and lack connectivity, please contact the Public Service Dept directly 1-800-622-4496.

Lastly I will put in a plug again for everyone to complete the Census. This is critical information for our state and our town and region to access economic development resources. [census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

### May 15

No doubt you have heard that Governor Scott has further relaxed restrictions on activities. Retail stores may reopen. Summer camps may operate. Outdoor activities are allowed. Construction projects may resume. All are subject to limitations and guidelines.

A good summary of these is on Agency of Commerce & Community Development website: <https://accd.vermont.gov/news/update-new-work-safe-additions-stay-home-stay-safe-order>. Also see my website for many more links: [CampbellForVermont.com/news-events](https://CampbellForVermont.com/news-events).

Notable among continuing restrictions is the limit of 10 people in a group. Notably absent from restrictions is mandatory use of a mask when in close proximity in public. With the emphasis placed on it by Health Commissioner Levine, this would seem prudent.

Progress is finally being made on the unemployment backlog, though there are still cases to be resolved, apparently overlooked by acting Commissioner Michael Harrington in his comments at Wednesday's press conference. If you are still having difficulties, please contact me or your local State Representative so one of us can submit an inquiry on your behalf.

One point still in question (as of this writing on May 14) is why the Governor is waiting to give the go-ahead to an all-mail ballot for the November general election. The Legislature has authorized it, and Secretary of State Jim Condos says a decision must be made now. I wrote a commentary on this for the Caledonian-Record that should appear soon (a draft is on my website).

Further re-opening of the economy depends on widely available testing and contact-tracing. Health officials announced May 13 that anyone can get tested at a series of pop-up sites around the state.

The site in our area will be Lyndon Town School on Saturday, May 23, from 9 AM to 3 PM. You do NOT have to have symptoms to be tested. If you live with or come into contact with a vulnerable person, or live with a healthcare or other essential worker, consider getting tested. Make an appointment at <https://humanresources.vermont.gov/popups>

Regarding the State budget, House Appropriations has agreed with the Scott Administration on a budget adjustment bill for the fiscal year ending 6/30/20. It will be voted on by the full House on Friday, 5/15.

My committee, House Energy & Technology, held a joint hearing with Senate Finance on 5/12 regarding the Public Service Dept's Emergency Broadband Action Plan, released 5/5. It seems clear we need to be prioritizing immediate broadband deployment, even if it is not "future-proof" technology (i.e., fiber-optic cable to the premises). We cannot risk another shutdown — or continuing this one — with the disparity in internet access that currently exists. Also if funding can be used from the federal CARES Act, we're told it must be spent by 12/31/20.

HE&T is meeting with PSD again on 5/15. Our priority is making meaningful progress on broadband deployment in the next few months.

### May 9

Much of the legislative conversation this week has been about unemployment benefits. Wednesday's "all-House caucus" (a discussion rather than a session to take action on bills) included a presentation by Secretary of Civil & Military Affairs Brittney Wilson.

Dozens of questions and stories from legislators followed. It's clear that thousands of Vermonters are still waiting for their claims to be processed and suffering nearly two months of no income. What's less clear is why.

I have had only a handful of residents contact me for help. So it was eye-opening and heart-wrenching to hear my colleagues' stories.

People are calling hundreds — thousands — of times. They get a busy signal or put on hold and dropped. Worse, if that's possible, when they get through, many are getting connected to an outsourced call-center employee who doesn't know how to help. Still worse, we heard more than one story of call-center people being unprofessional and rude.

Governor Phil Scott's Administration deserves plenty of praise for how they have coped with the crisis. From the Governor to his appointees to career staff, all have performed admirably and selflessly to protect Vermonters. Unfortunately this is one area where they have stumbled. I think Sec. Wilson was a little taken aback by what she heard. The following day Dept. of Labor Commissioner Michael Harrington sent a detailed letter attempting to address concerns raised by legislators. I am still hoping DOL is able to get on track with this critical problem.

Another critical, if longer-festering, issue is broadband, as I've mentioned here many times. The Public Service Dept. released an Emergency Broadband Action Plan on May 5. The Plan is a recognition of how vital internet access is in a crisis like this. Even more, it's a recognition of the social divide laid bare and widened by it.

The Plan's objective is "to connect the unconnected to the internet in Vermont." It is an inventory of actions that we must take or prepare for, in the expectation of Federal funding from various programs. House Energy & Technology (my committee) met Friday to discuss the Plan and prepare for a joint hearing with Senate Finance. The hearing, with PSD Commissioner June Tierney and Telecom Director Clay Purvis, will be next Tuesday, May 12.

I am writing this on May 8, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in Europe day. I'm too young to remember it, but I grew up in the afterglow of the Allied victory. The World War 2 generation has been called the "Greatest Generation." They were our parents and grandparents, and they were indeed great. But greatness proceeds from rising to the challenge of events. The more dire the events, the more greatness is called forth. We are in the midst of a world-wide pandemic, an extremely dire event. Now is our time to call forth our inner greatness.

### May 2

A front-page article in Thursday's Caledonian-Record, entitled "Legislators Knew of VSC Crisis March 20," is correct in its particulars. However the implication that legislators had been told of the proposal to close VSC campuses almost a month before the news broke is not correct. The first email I received alerting me to the proposal was from an NVU professor on April 14.

As the article says, the letter from then-Chancellor Spaulding was marked "Privileged and Confidential" and addressed to the Governor and copied to the House Speaker, Senate Pro Tem, and House and Senate Appropriations Chairs. It was not shared with other legislators.

In fact, legislators and the general public could hardly not have known of the precariousness of VSC. Four small private Vermont colleges have closed in the last couple of years. That the Covid crisis spiked an already-serious problem may be a shock, but it is not a surprise.

### Legislative notes:

At Friday's House floor session we passed two bills. S.333 suspends eviction and foreclosure proceeds against renters and owners during the covid emergency declaration. This is an important protection to keep people in their homes during the crisis.

But it is equally important that everyone understand that this is NOT a payment holiday. Renters still owe their rent and owners still owe their mortgage payments.

This bill was the result of a remarkable degree of collaboration between tenant advocates, the statewide landlord association, and the bankers' association. It strikes a balance, respecting renters, landlords, and mortgage holders, while protecting public health and safety.

S.344, the other bill passed Friday, allows — but does not require — towns and municipalities to delay property tax deadlines and waive late fees and penalties temporarily during the emergency declaration.

Both bills passed with about 90% support.

The crisis has also put broadband internet high on everyone's list of critical infrastructure. House Energy & Technology (my committee) and Senate Finance have taken much testimony the last few weeks on strategies to increase its availability.

Internet providers, including video cable, traditional telephone and cellphone companies, are implementing temporary fixes.

Longer term, electric utilities' need for sophisticated load control, and the broadband need to built out fiber-optic networks, offers great possibilities of converging interests. Advances in wireless technology, and other technologies such as low-earth satellites, offer other opportunities.

I believe we are finally taking real strides to solve the broadband deployment problem. I expect the solution will include multiple technologies and involve multiple players — including the new NEK Community Broadband communications union district. It won't be solved next month or even next year, unfortunately, but we will solve it.

Lastly, I want to join those recognizing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the killing of four unarmed Kent State students by the Ohio National Guard on May 4, 1970. That tragedy shocked the nation, and joined a procession of shocks and social upheavals whose reverberations we still feel today. (I recommend Ken Burns' Vietnam War series, if you have access to Netflix or PBS.)

We must fight on. By that, I mean assert the truth and advance the general welfare as we see best; but recognize that those with other views are not our enemy, but our colleagues and fellow travelers in this great adventure called self-government.

#### April 28

Reps from other districts say that many constituents are contacting them about problems with unemployment benefits, whether regular employee Unemployment Insurance (UI), or self-employed / independent contractor Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). Everyone acknowledges the backlog has been unacceptable.

But I have heard about problems from very few people. I don't know whether that's because St. Johnsbury residents have been lucky and haven't had problems, or because people haven't contacted me.

If you have had problems, and you live in St. Johnsbury, please do contact me. The House has launched a tool where Reps can collect constituent UI/PUA issues and send them directly to DOL for speedier resolution.

Please email me at [scampbell@leg.state.VT.us](mailto:scampbell@leg.state.VT.us) with the information listed below. As a reminder, DO NOT POST SENSITIVE INFORMATION HERE OR ANYWHERE PUBLIC.

Below is the information you will need to provide when you contact me:

First Name

Last Name

Phone number

Last 4 of SSN

Email address

Have you received a UI/PUA or stimulus check yet?

When did you apply for UI?

What issue are you experiencing:

If regular unemployment insurance (UI):

- Haven't received a benefit yet
- Didn't receive the \$1200 check
- Need PIN reset
- SSN error
- Eligibility
- Believe you were wrongly denied

If Pandemic unemployment assistance (PUA)

- Can't access the system to finish the application
- Made an error, need to update application
- Haven't received a benefit yet
- SSN error
- Believe you were wrongly denied

April 24

I'm sure everyone has heard by now that VT State College Chancellor Jeb Spaulding on Wednesday withdrew his recommendation to close both NVU and VT Tech Randolph campuses. We are all breathing a little easier.

But we must remain vigilant and engaged. Next week the Legislature will begin to scrutinize VSC's \$25 million funding request and determine the conditions and benchmarks that will be associated with what is provided. After bridge funding for next year is secured, the hard work begins to craft a sustainable model for programming, infrastructure and funding.

The other matter of particular interest to us in St. Johnsbury is the status of the covid-positive inmates at the Correctional Complex. Last I heard earlier this week, none were showing symptoms and all were being tested again in order to be cleared to return to their original facility in St. Albans. Caledonian-Record reported today (Friday) that NVRH, CALEX, and St. J's Health Officer all say communication and coordination with Dept of Corrections is much improved. They are satisfied with the protocols in place in case any inmates do require hospital care or preparation for transport to Burlington.

Thursday 4/23, the House of Representatives met for the first time in remote floor session, a historic occasion. It's taken a while to set up the technology necessary to accommodate 150 House members plus half a dozen staff in a Zoom meeting. Protocols for debate and voting had to be worked out.

The first question was whether to confirm the temporary remote voting procedure, as conditionally approved on March 25 by an emergency in-person quorum. Confirmation by at least three-quarters of members was required. Thursday, approval of the temporary procedure was confirmed 148-0 (one member absent, Speaker not voting).

The bills to be taken up, in the initial phase of remote sessions, will all be in response to the covid-19 emergency. At this first session, we approved by near-unanimous votes several such bills allowing technical changes to various existing requirements in order to facilitate effective response.



One bill to note, S.341, affects self-employed persons and independent contractors. These folks typically don't qualify for Unemployment Insurance but are covered under the Federal CARES Act by Pandemic Unemployment Assistance benefits. The bill allows sharing of tax info between the Tax Dept and Dept of Labor as needed to calculate benefits. There is now a link to apply on DOL's site [labor.vermont.gov](http://labor.vermont.gov).

Governor Scott today loosened restrictions a bit more, allowing businesses to resume with workers in groups up to five. It's tempting to think we're through the worst — and I hope we are.

But infection rates could quickly come roaring back without a vaccine and widespread contact-tracing — both matters requiring leadership from the Federal government. Unfortunately that has been fitful and weak, leaving states to fend for themselves. We can be proud of our success so far in Vermont. Let's not let up.

### April 18

Everyone no doubt has heard that the Vermont State College System's Board of Trustees will be meeting on Monday. They will be voting whether to accept the recommendation to close NVU-Lyndon, NVU-Johnson and VT Tech College -Randolph, and consolidate programming at Castleton and VTC-Williston. The press release is here: <https://www.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FINAL-VSC-Transformation-Press-Release-4-17-20.v2.pdf>

I think it's safe to say all legislators in the affected regions are united in determined opposition to this recommendation. Senator Benning, an LSC grad and former VSC trustee, wrote a particularly in-depth "Open letter to Trustees" that's posted on his facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/joe.benning.18>.

I too have written to the Trustees, in addition to 30 legislators and I don't know how many NVU professors and local residents.

Now is your chance to communicate to the Board yourself. Here is the link to the public comment survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J8BRV5Z>. Your comment will have the most impact if you keep it short, to the point, and respectful.

### April 16 (2)

I and other area legislators continue to work on two issues of primary importance to our area: status of covid-positive inmates at Northeast Correctional in St. Johnsbury; and the dire financial situation at Northern VT University, obviously especially the Lyndon campus.

As a follow-up to Monday's St. Johnsbury Select Board meeting with Dept of Corrections Interim Commissioner Jim Baker and Facilities Executive Al Cormier, I have asked Mr. Baker and Mr. Cormier to hold a separate public meeting to address people's concerns directly. I have heard a lot of anger across the ideological spectrum. I don't expect that a chance to express that anger directly to DOC and to hear their response will answer all the questions or defuse all the anger. But I think a further effort at communication is important.

Some have called for an investigation into DOC's decisions to isolate sick inmates at NECC. Senator Benning said yesterday the Senate Judiciary committee has already started.

On the NVU issue, I have received several emails from NVU professors expressing their alarm. I circulated one to 30 legislators in the NEK and Johnson vicinity, as well as chairs and vice chairs of the Education committees and the three legislative members of of the VT State College System Board of Trustees. We are all obviously concerned.

Longstanding lack of State financial support — leading to out-of-reach tuition rates and reduction of programming — has combined with the demographic reality of fewer college-age students and the coronavirus crisis to create the proverbial perfect storm.

There is no easy answer to this, but it seems clear dramatically increased State support is needed. Vermont is at or near the bottom of states' support for their college systems. VSCS Chancellor Jeb Spaulding has requested \$25 million more in annual support, in addition to the approximately \$30 million currently budgeted.

I am no expert on education financing or programming. (There are some who believe we should "simply" reduce spending on preK-12 and devote those resources to VSCS. I suspect if that were possible it would have been done already.) But it is clear that losing NVU would be economically devastating to the NEK and Lamoille County and environs.

I am extremely worried about this situation. Everyone is aware of the fiscal challenges presented by the covid crisis. Where can we find \$25 million when tax revenue has fallen off a cliff? Yet I wonder what would be the cost in lost economic activity and increased State spending required by poverty and economic development programs?

The VSCS Board is meeting on Monday, April 20. You can email the Board Chair, Church Hinds at [j.hindes@vsc.edu](mailto:j.hindes@vsc.edu), and Chancellor Spaulding at [jeb.spaulding@vsc.edu](mailto:jeb.spaulding@vsc.edu). If you write, please keep it short, to the point, and respectful.

### April 16

A view from staff inside the Northeast Correctional Complex in St. Johnsbury

I received this a copy of this letter originally sent by Karen Holmes, Volunteer Services Coordinator at NECC, to active Dept of Corrections volunteers. I contacted her to ask if I could post it here. After receiving permission from her admin, she agreed.

Hello All,

First – I hope that all of you are taking good care of yourselves and your families. Many of you have written to check in or offer letters to the men who remain here. Thank you so much for thinking of them especially during a time when the care and safety of your own families and livelihoods may be threatened. We are in a constant state of planning and adjusting here at NECC. So much so, that I have started and stopped this letter several times over the course of the last week. Every time I sit down to write, something interrupts me and the focus shifts again.

As of this moment, I can say, we are doing well. The inmates who are here, those who are healthy and working essential jobs (kitchen staff, cleaning, etc.), and those who are here as a result of a positive test, are weathering the storm. It's been intensely difficult at times. Fear and anxiety have come in waves - sometimes tsunamis. Overall, those waves have been absorbed and deescalated skillfully by an incredible frontline staff.

Many of you know that I come from a Restorative Justice background, which frankly at its core, can be somewhat anti-corrections. I suspect that many of you have come to the work you do with and for DoC, as a result of some discontent with Corrections. I respect that skepticism. Additionally, I hope that each one of you has had at least one, possibly several interactions with DoC staff that has broadened that opinion to include a caring, well-intentioned, dedicated, and professional staff.

If you've been paying attention to the news, you'll know that NECC staff are not the most popular within the St Johnsbury community right now. This is a particularly hard pill to swallow during a time when our staff, like many medical professionals, are on the front line, potentially risking their lives for the safety of a different, maybe less popular demographic, but still very much deserving of care. I can tell you, without hesitation, from where I sit, I've seen a staggering level of dedication, compassion, and integrity amongst my co-workers in the "hot zone". I'm so filled with pride be part of this team right now.

My request to you all is for a show of support. We are welcoming signs, banners, cards/letters to staff, social media posts, Front Porch Forum discussions – whatever you prefer or have capacity for, public or private shows of support would be so welcome at this time.

If this is something you're able to do and would like to arrange the logistics around a delivery of signs, banners, or cards, or you want a set of eyes on a public post before you hit "send", I'm here. Gathering support for our staff is my main priority right now.

Thank you all for being a group of people that I can confidently reach out to with this message from my heart.

Be well and stay safe,  
Karen

### April 15

Dept of Corrections Interim Commissioner Jim Baker and Facilities Executive Al Cormier met with the St. Johnsbury Select Board last evening and discussed the covid-positive inmates isolated at St. Johnsbury's Northeast Correctional Complex.

Mr. Baker highlighted the planning parameters at the Agency of Human Services (where DOC is housed). He said, first, they follow the best medical advice of Health Commissioner Mark Levine and the Centers for Disease Control. Further, their priority is to avoid having inmates take resources needed by host communities.

If a group of inmates tests positive for the virus, best medical advice is to isolate them from the rest of the prison population. They selected St. Johnsbury for that isolation based on its physical layout (two separate buildings), mechanicals (3 separate air-handling systems), low population, and staffing.

Mr. Baker noted that there are several other "surge" facilities for homeless and other populations in other parts of the state, including Burlington and Rutland.

The sudden discovery of 32 positive inmates after universal testing last Thursday at the St. Albans facility forced sudden implementation of the plan. Again last night, they acknowledged poor communication and vowed to do better.

Mr. Cormier reviewed protocols implemented at St. J's NECC: physical separation of "warm" zones and "hot" zones; a decontamination tent; staff training in decon techniques; and best-practice personal protective equipment. St. Johnsbury Fire Chief and Town Health Officer Jon Bouffard has reviewed the protocols and found them adequate; he is touring NECC today (Tuesday).

Mr. Baker reiterated the commitment announced in the weekend DOC press release to transport any inmates needing hospitalization to UVMMC, not NVRH. Remote "tele-medicine" consult is being set up to assess need to transport. DOC will contract with an outside entity for transportation, perhaps the National Guard. CALEX CEO Michael Wright, also in attendance, noted that until such arrangements are finalized, any inmates needing transport would be handled by CALEX and taken to the nearest hospital, i.e., NVRH.

I asked about plans in case 100 or 150 more inmates test positive in the coming weeks. Mr. Baker said NECC is staffed and equipped for up to 53 inmates. The plan beyond that is to keep as many as possible in their current facility, though he didn't share exact numbers. They are still in the planning stage in case the covid-positive inmate population overwhelms capacities.

Mr. Baker also addressed the issue of staff leaving the facility after their shifts. The decon protocols offer as much as assurance as possible that they will not be bringing the virus with them. (Other workers such as health care and grocery clerks also run this risk and may be following less rigorous protocols.) DOC is renting several rooms at Comfort Inn and is providing DOC staff so that hotel staff does not interact with correctional workers. Vacated rooms are left vacant for 5 days prior to thorough cleaning.

The meeting left me with a high degree of confidence that DOC, Human Services, and Dept of Health are working in good faith and with the best knowledge possible in this unprecedented crisis. This is not a matter of St. Johnsbury being a "dumping ground." Such a narrative is not only counterproductive, it is self-destructive, in my view. It reveals a defeatist attitude that holds us back from celebrating what is uniquely great about St. Johnsbury and the NEK.

### April 13

Responding to concerns expressed on FPF and directly to me:

Are the covid-positive inmates transferred to St. Johnsbury from St. Albans convicted of more serious crimes than the typical inmate here? Likely the answer is yes. Unfortunately dealing with the crisis takes priority.

Why aren't the 27 positive inmates counted in the Caledonia County totals by the Dept of Health? I don't know the answer but will ask.

How is DOC protecting St. Johnsbury from workers spreading the virus to the community? Human Services Secretary Smith was asked this at the Governor's press conference today (Monday). He said protocols are much stricter now; St J has a decontamination tent and better protective equipment. The covid inmates are in a separate building from the remaining St. J inmates (who are there because they handle jobs within the facility such as food prep). Sec. Smith said at a previous press conference that they can't, and shouldn't, control the actions of workers who are off duty. Today he added that the issue is the same with all front-line workers including health care and essential businesses.

I'll take this opportunity to urge all grocery store and other workers in contact with the public to wear masks! The same goes for all customers. It's for your own safety as well as that of the community. Governor Scott was asked whether he would mandate masks for everyone out in public. He said to expect that eventuality to be addressed this week.

Could we track DOC workers who are caring for infected inmates, as has been done in South Korea for example, so that if there is spread of the virus, contact-tracing would be possible? Health Commissioner Levine said today this is not likely in Vermont.

DOC Commissioner Jim Baker and Facilities Executive Al Cormier will join the St. Johnsbury Select Board meeting at 6:00 PM tonight (Monday). You can watch live on Kingdom Access TV, channel 192, or stream from their website <http://www.katv.org/ch192live>. [Recording available at

### April 11

Correction on Friday's post: Apparently I mis-heard Sec. Smith at the Governor's press conference. Dept of Corrections is NOT planning universal testing of the corrections system. They will test everyone in a facility only when ONE person tests positive. This is due to the still-not-unlimited supply of tests. (Same also applies to other group-living residences such as nursing homes and other residential treatment facilities.)

Friday afternoon, Administration officials from Agency of Human Services and Dept of Corrections got on the phone with NVRH. They later held a conference call with area legislators, and also held a press conference.

The officials explained their alarm at test results showing 32 inmates positive at the St. Albans facility, and the urgency of the decision to move 28 of them to the previously planned surge facility at Northeast Regional Correctional in St. J. They acknowledged a lack of timely communication.

The legislators on the call (Sen. Benning, Rep. Emmons, Rep. Beck, Rep. Shaw, myself) emphasized the need for transparency with the public about their plans and contingencies.

Administration officials appear intent on making amends. They plan to conference-call the Select Board next week.

I wrote again to the Governor, AHS and DOC today in a further attempt to articulate community concerns and the urgent need for detailed public communications.

There have been some other developments to highlight. Please see my website for links: <https://www.campbellforvermont.com/news-events>

Dept of Labor is trying to tame the flood of calls regarding Unemployment coverage in order to answer more calls more quickly. They ask for people to call on specific days of the week based on first letter of their last name.

Dept of Motor Vehicles has put made driver's license renewal online. DMV also announced vehicle inspections due in April (i.e., 2020 "4" sticker) will be automatically extended to June.

Dept of Health has a new graphic dashboard showing status of the virus in Vermont.

Vermont Legal Aid has put up a web page with information on a variety of legal topics such as court operations, and federal and state benefits.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. I will respond as quickly as I can.

#### April 10

The sudden spike in the number of inmates who tested positive at the St. Albans correctional facility — and the move of 28 of them to the St. Johnsbury facility — has surprised and alarmed all of us in the community.

Dept of Corrections communication with St. Johnsbury town and NVRH has not been timely or complete, I think it's fair to say.

However, I think we can all agree that the Administration, from the Governor to the staff at all agencies, has been doing an incredible job responding to this crisis. That gives me a great deal of trust that DOC has made careful plans and preparations to handle covid-positive inmates.

It does make sense to isolate these inmates from the rest of the uninfected prison population. As the St. Johnsbury facility had beds available, it also makes sense to make it the location to put infected inmates.

What we need to know is, what are the plans? We need more transparency from DOC and the St J facility.

I have been in touch with the local director, the town manager, NVRH, and the Governor's office, seeking that transparency.

Agency of Human Services Secretary Mike Smith addressed the issue at Friday's press conference, at least in generalities. He said the St. J facility has a capacity of 80 beds for infected inmates. He added that they have contingency plans to handle more if needed. Also, DOC will begin testing all inmates and staff in all facilities immediately.

I will keep pressing for more details. For now, let's give the Administration and DOC the benefit of the doubt.

#### April 7

Here are some relevant updates. For brevity, I have posted links on my website: <https://www.campbellforvermont.com/news-events>

Federal relief: Senator Sanders' "Bernie Buzz" email blast today has a good summary of what is available for individuals.

Unemployment payments: VT Dept of Labor just issued a good FAQ. DOL is holding a "virtual town hall" to review the process for making a claim and answer questions: Wed, April 8, 8:30 to 9:15 AM, [bit.ly/1VTlaborTownHall](https://bit.ly/1VTlaborTownHall) Claimants

Health Insurance: VT Health Connect has opened enrollment through April 17.

Child care, info for providers: Dept of Children & Families has a good FAQ.

Census: Please don't forget to respond to the census. It's critically important to ensure Vermont's access to Federal programs and grants.

Firearms dealers are considered "essential services" and sales are required by state and Federal law to be done in-person. Nevertheless, dealers are required to observe guidelines to minimize risk.

Other announcements:

Governor Scott expects to extend the Stay Home / Stay Safe directive beyond April 15. An announcement will be forthcoming this week.

If you must go out, wear a cloth mask per this week's strong recommendation from Health Commissioner Levine.

VT PBS will begin partnering with the Agency of Education to provide targeted programming and online resources for pre-K through grade 12 students during the crisis.

#### April 4

These warnings come courtesy of the Community of Vermont Elders (COVE) but are a good warning for everyone.

Beware of the following:

Fake Stimulus Checks. There are fake checks circulating right now. It will take at least three weeks for direct deposits to land and up to 10 weeks for paper checks to arrive by mail. If you receive any checks now, it is a fraud. Telltale signs are checks written in odd amounts or include cents, or a check that requires you to verify receipt online or by calling a number.

Facebook, text, or social media messages claiming to get in touch with you. Scammers are reaching out to people online on social media platforms or by sending text messages with claims they are from the IRS or other government agency and are trying to get in touch with you regarding your stimulus check. Ignore these messages. The U.S. Government will never reach out to you via any social media platform or by text.

US Emergency Grants Federation is a fake website. Scammers pose as a government agency and will send a link to this website or something similar for you to verify personal information. The government does not do this. The government already has the information they need and will not reach out to you for verification of your social security number or other personal identification.

Processing Fee. Scammers pose as the IRS or other government agency claiming you can receive your stimulus check faster if you pay a processing fee. There is no such thing and there is no way to speed up the IRS payment process.

Any correspondence with the IRS or U.S. Treasury. The IRS will never call or email you to verify any personal information. This includes your social security number, bank account number, or anything that allows access to your identity. As soon as you receive a call or email saying they are from the IRS or U.S. Treasury, hang up or trash it.

These scammers and fraudsters are professional criminals and will use a variety of methods to steal your personal identification and your money. They use scare tactics and even attempt to befriend vulnerable people into trusting them.

To report a scam call or email contact the Vermont Attorney General's Consumer Assistance Program at 1800-649-2424.

Best wishes to everyone.

April 1

Friends and neighbors,

My nagging not-Covid illness, particularly the cough, has kept me pretty exhausted and laying low since my last update last Friday.

My body's standard response to colds and flus is to sleep. Ten or twelve hours a day feels restorative. What's been strange about not-Covid is I have only been able to sleep five or six hours a night, and no more than a few hours at a time.

I have been waking to feelings of dread, overwhelmed by the crisis-information firehose, trying to make sense of it and organize it. I felt, as I'm sure many others have, like I was watching the planes hit the towers over a two-week period, knowing what is happening and about to happen, unable to stop it or to turn away.

It's traumatizing.

We're all traumatized. And for many of us, the emotional trauma is overwhelmed by the financial stress of lost income or possible loss of our business. And some of us are also getting sick.

Recognizing the high stress of these unprecedented times is the first step to coping with it. So, let's all start by admitting we are struggling.

Next, take conscious steps for self-care. Take a break from the news (a big one for me), go outside for a walk, volunteer at one of the many efforts underway (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A55-ewMX64Yef-neJ1Cx2DXaOdl12Dtjw-nY3TY9WIE/edit>).

Not least, show love to loved ones. Being cooped up for weeks or months heightens domestic friction. Count to ten and remember, these are the people who love you.

My own effort to dial back the fever pitch will include less frequent posts here with a less "crisis-mode" format. Resource information is more widely available and better organized than it was even a week ago.

However I will continue updates on the doings of my committee and the legislature generally. The news there is, remote committee meetings are starting in earnest this week; my committee meets today (Wednesday). All meetings may be viewed by the public; see [legislature.vermont.gov](http://legislature.vermont.gov). Remote voting software will be test-driven over next few weeks.

That's all for now. Take care of yourselves and others.



### March 27

Folks, I have been down since Tuesday with what seemed COVID-19 symptoms — cough, fever, shortness of breath. I was tested right away (wife's a doc, essential to more than just me), and received results Friday morning: negative. Good news, except it means there's a worse bug still out there!

Much has happened this week.

Gov. Scott issued a "stay home, stay safe" order, closing non-essential businesses. Guidance on what non-essential means: <https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19-guidance/stay-home-stay-safe-business-faqs>

The Gov. also closed schools for the rest of the school year, requiring districts to develop continuity-of-instruction plans. See the local district's website. St. J: <https://www.stjisd.org/>

The Legislature has put in place systems to allow continued work remotely on the crisis and pass needed legislation.

Health Commissioner Levine announced (Friday) that testing restrictions have been relaxed, so anyone with symptoms can get tested. Still need to call a healthcare provider to order a test; don't just show up and expect to get a test.

Health Department's website has new info: [healthvermont.gov/covid19](http://healthvermont.gov/covid19)

- Resource page for healthcare workers
- One-page fact sheets on waiting for results, what if positive, what if living with someone who's positive
- A Question box for automated responses to questions

Tax: Clarification that while income tax AND Homestead Declaration AND 1<sup>st</sup> quarter estimated tax filing and payment are pushed back from April 15 to July 15, 2020, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter estimated payment is still due June 15.

Federal: The \$2 trillion bill has passed Congress and will be a help. Here's link to the poster advising employees of paid leave due to the virus, that must displayed by businesses by April 1: [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/posters/FFCRA\\_Poster\\_WH1422\\_Non-Federal.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/posters/FFCRA_Poster_WH1422_Non-Federal.pdf)

And to an FAQ for business owners: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-poster-questions>

### March 23

New and updated (previous posts 3/21, 3/19 and 3/17)

St. Johnsbury has its first confirmed positive case. Two more are confirmed in Orleans County.

Gov Scott said at a press conference today that he expects to issue what is effectively a stay-at-home directive in next few days. Unfortunately we don't have detail on what that would mean, but seems prudent to advise.

Self-Employed: Since they do not pay into the Unemployment Insurance trust fund, self-employed are not eligible for UI benefits. However, at the federal level, Congress is aware of the issue and is trying to address.

Childcare: stabilization payment <https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Docs/COVID/COVID-Private-Tuition-Payments-Stabilization-Guidance.pdf>

Childcare: Who are essential persons? <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-covid19-supplemental-guidance-child-care-essential-persons-updated-3-21.pdf>

What help is available? Best resource lists so far:

Federal: Congress passed two rescue bills and is negotiating a third. Summary on USA Today <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/2020/03/23/congress-stimulus-packages-coronavirus-graphics/2890864001/>

Statewide: (listed 3/19) VT Retail Grocers <https://vtrga.org/heath-information>

NEK: (also listed 3/19) NEK Collaborative Google doc [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tPvpLh9alaX\\_WaVIn7KVMjhqZxpu6O6crxCc01F-jJ0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tPvpLh9alaX_WaVIn7KVMjhqZxpu6O6crxCc01F-jJ0/edit)

General Assembly: Many committees are back in action this week, though remotely. House/Senate Rules working to temporarily allow remote voting, and how to keep the process open to the public.

GA: House bill H.742, passed right before adjournment, is VT's first legislative response to the crisis. Senate has considered and made adjustments that are acceptable to House committees. More detail after it is finalized this week.

Local Government: Temporary changes being drafted to open-meeting law to allow remote, "virtual" meetings for municipalities as well as state; standard warnings & minutes would still be required.

Utility disconnects: In addition to electricity (mentioned on 3/19), no phone disconnects for nonpayment are allowed through April 30; cable may be added to this.

Many local businesses are really hurting. Please patronize them as you can. Call and see if take-out meals are available. Consider making a donation to nonprofits if you are able. Don't hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns, or accounts of your situation.

Above all, stay home, stay healthy, and be kind to yourself and each other.

### March 21

New and updated (previous posts 3/19 and 3/17)

Gov. Scott today limited "non-essential" gatherings to 10 PEOPLE effective now; and directed closure of "close-contact" businesses, effective 8:00 PM Monday 3/23.

"Non-essential" gatherings does NOT mean transit areas like airports or bus terminals; typical offices, construction, manufacturing, or other places of employment; retail stores; or similar places where people can maintain 6 feet social distancing.

"Close-contact" businesses means those where 6 feet social distancing is not practical, such as fitness centers and hair, nail or tattoo salons.

Business: Following statewide disaster declaration, small business owners can apply for disaster loans at <https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/resources>. Businesses are encouraged to seek professional business counseling before taking on additional debt.

Taxes: The IRS and VT Tax Dept have updated due dates. Now tax payment AND FILING dates for both federal and state income taxes have been moved from April 15 to July 15, 2020.

Housing: Friday's Joint Rules Committee call focused on housing issues, especially for homeless. Numbers of homeless are rising, due to loss of income and other factors. The state Dept of Children & Families and Office of Economic Opportunity are increasing resources and services to assist: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/oeo>

Legislature: The public is welcome to listen in to Joint Rules Committee conference calls, daily at 4 PM: phone (646) 558-8656; ID: 615-543-0466#.

Legislature: The public can also hear the House Caucus of the Whole. Next meeting Monday 3/23, 1:00 PM: phone (253) 215-8782; ID: 579-782-593#. (There are two other phone numbers in case that one's busy: (301) 715-8592; or (346) 248-7799.)

Legislature: Senate will be meeting again next week, in shifts to comply with the Governor's directive. Five (of 14) House committees will resume meeting via video conferencing next week. They are committees on Appropriations, Ways & Means, Commerce & Economic Development, Corrections & Institutions, and Government Operations. More committees will meet in subsequent weeks as IT is able to set it up.

Again, take care of yourselves and your neighbors. Call and check in on family and friends. Make social distancing an occasion for solidarity.

More later.

### March 19

New and updated since Tuesday.

General news stories on Cal-Rec, VTDigger, NY Times (no paywall for COVID stories), etc.

NEK Resources list (interactive Google doc): [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tPvpLh9alaX\\_WaVln7KvmjhgZxpu6O6crxCc01F-jJ0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tPvpLh9alaX_WaVln7KvmjhgZxpu6O6crxCc01F-jJ0/edit)

Health: NVRH has set up drive-through testing. Need referral from doctor.

Health: Prescriptions: Pharmacies authorized to fill 30-day supply (not narcotics).

Insurance: Uninsured or UNDER-insured, VT HealthConnect may help.  
Missed premium payments: Legislature working on.

Unemployment: Dept of Labor added second hotline and online application form. Answers on reduced employment (shorter hours) still being determined.  
Phones: try first 1-877-214-3330; if no luck, try 1-888-807-7072

Online: <https://appengine.egov.com/apps/vt/dol/unemploymentinsuranceclaim>

Self-employed folks are in a tougher spot. If they don't have business-interruption insurance, the main options are same as for businesses generally, below. Legislative action possible but not immediately.

Childcare: Most closed till April 6. See FAQ; updated list of "essential persons" (for whom services continue) and help finding programs; financial assistance info; etc. at: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/covid-19>

Business: resources for emergency financing

VT Economic Development Authority: <https://www.veda.org/newsevents/covid19updates>

Good collection of info at VT Retail Grocers: <https://vtrga.org/health-information>

U.S. Small Business Administration: <https://www.sba.gov/page/coronavirus-covid-19-small-business-guidance-loan-resources>

Food: With sit-down service suspended, many restaurants are closed. Others offer take-out. Call first, but support our local restaurants by buying take-out if offered.

Taxes: Fed and VT: April 15 PAYMENT deadlines delayed, but forms still must be FILED by then.

Electric shutoffs for nonpayment: Not allowed at least until April 30.

DMV: In-person transactions suspended; try online [dmv.vermont.gov](http://dmv.vermont.gov)

Arts: Catamount Arts closed, shows postponed (NOT cancelled) dates TBA. Support Kickstarter to continue programming [https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/kcppresents/kcp-presents-performing-arts-in-northern-vt?ref=nav\\_search&result=project&term=kcp%20](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/kcppresents/kcp-presents-performing-arts-in-northern-vt?ref=nav_search&result=project&term=kcp%20)

Legislature: House not meeting next week; some committees meeting virtually. Joint Rules committee meeting 4 PM daily by conference call; relevant updates included in future post.

Rep. Campbell regularly scheduled Coffee Hour NOT meeting this week. Willing to do conference call at 9 AM Saturday. Email me if you'd like to do so.

Folks, this is a scary situation, no question. Together, we will get through it and continue to rebuild our community. Persevere!

### March 17

The coronavirus situation is evolving rapidly. Clearly the effects are far-reaching and lasting. Please know your State government is working nonstop to cushion the impacts as much as possible.

I will collect and post brief updates every few days.

- Front Porch Forum has lifted the 5 post per month limit for legislators to update communities. Well done and thank you FPF! Members, please show your support with a monthly contribution.

- Health: Stay home if you can. If you have a fever, call your primary care provider; if you don't have one, call the hospital (NVRH), 748-8141. If COVID-19 testing is needed, you will be given one at no cost.
- Health: Northern Counties Health Care (NCHC) clinics are open as usual, but request you call first. Dental offices are open for emergency services only.
- Health: Regular Health Dept updates posted at [healthvermont.gov/covid19](https://healthvermont.gov/covid19)
- Health: Visiting nursing homes, assisted living, and transitional facilities is sharply restricted. Call first.
- Food: Veggie Van Go, fresh produce provided by the VT Food Bank, is still on. NVRH parking lot, Thursday, 3/20, 10 AM.
- Food: Restaurants are closed, though they may provide take-out food. Bars are closed; allowing take-out sales is under consideration. Grocery stores are open.
- Schools: preK-12 schools closed March 18 to at least April 6. Plans expected to be in place for food and special-needs services for students who need them; for childcare option for parents; and for maintenance of education during closure.
- Childcare: Private facilities making their own decisions. Legislature and Administration are working on assistance with costs for parents, wages for workers, and business expenses for providers.
- Business: Obviously this is extremely challenging for businesses. State and Federal officials are working on supports (VT Economic Development Authority, US Small Business Administration, etc.). Here is an editable Google doc with list of statewide sources: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/17DJMyLZR\\_Fk7MzaCD9AU008a61VGVvoeNs4qbVk0z3E/edit?fbclid=IwAR1D6dGDTij2JZIATH2wFonR35wP1gyh8DnzOfkuPHNtmIthh0N56P7Pu0E](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17DJMyLZR_Fk7MzaCD9AU008a61VGVvoeNs4qbVk0z3E/edit?fbclid=IwAR1D6dGDTij2JZIATH2wFonR35wP1gyh8DnzOfkuPHNtmIthh0N56P7Pu0E)
- Business: St. Johnsbury businesses please see this survey posted by the St. J Chamber of Commerce: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1jSJdsFRblq0Tesj00ClirqyJsSsC2ZUsoisSnCzZ8so/viewform?edit\\_requested=true](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1jSJdsFRblq0Tesj00ClirqyJsSsC2ZUsoisSnCzZ8so/viewform?edit_requested=true)
- Government: Statehouse is closed this week. House is adjourned until Tues, 3/24; Senate committees are meeting virtually this week. House & Senate Joint Rules Committee is holding a conference call daily; House is holding conference call Tuesday & Thursday this week.
- Government: Many offices closed, though online services available. Check website, or call before visiting.

More later.

Feb 21

I'm a little late this week. I came down with the Statehouse crud last weekend and it put me behind.

But being late allows me to report the happy news that the House approved the Global Warming Solutions Act, H.688, on Thursday by a vote of 105-37. Now it's on to the Senate. I went into some detail on the bill in last week's post, and more in the Caledonian-Record commentary that was published Monday. That and other Cal-Rec commentaries are available on my website [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com).

H.688 has been the bulk of my committee's (Energy & Technology) work so far, though we have taken testimony on a Cybersecurity Awareness bill, H.692, that would require town and local officials who access state computer systems to receive cybersecurity awareness training. The bill as proposed would have state pay for the training, but the Governor's budget did not include the funding.

Testimony has highlighted important points, one being the need to avoid unnecessary redundancy. The Secretary of State's office already runs trainings on election procedures for town clerks. But of course, town clerks access other systems (such as vital records), and treasurers, listers, and others often need access to various systems.

Often the weak link in our systems is people. It's very easy to spoof a convincing-looking email that the boss has approved a payment, "just click here." The vulnerability of our systems to invasion, ransomware, and worse, is extremely worrying. We are continuing work on this.

On deck in Energy & Tech are bills regarding: updating the Renewable Energy Standard; allowing use of a portion of the Electric Efficiency Charge (which funds Efficiency Vermont's electric savings programs) to be used for "thermal" or heating efficiency work; and assessing options to maintain funding for the state's public-access television stations in the wake of changes in federal rules and the declining use of cable TV service.

In other notable House business, we passed a bill, H.568, that updates century-old statutes regarding prostitution and "sex work", and also creates a study committee to look at other updates that may be needed; the vote was 126-19. We also passed H.1 that prohibits non-compete agreements as a condition of employment, except for key employees meeting certain criteria. And we passed H.83 that prohibits female genital cutting or mutilation.

Note that my regular coffee hours are 1st and 3rd Saturdays (same as St. J Farmer's Market), 9:00 AM, Kitchen Counter Cafe. This Saturday is the 4th, next is the 5th; and the following Saturday I will be away. So the next coffee hour is not until March 21.

However I will be at Town Meeting, Monday, March 2, at 7:00 PM (meeting starts at 7:30), and much of the day at the polls on Tuesday, March 3; polls are open 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM.

Reminder also that there's a question on the Town Meeting ballot about whether St. Johnsbury should join the NEK Broadband communications union district. If you have questions, please come to an information meeting hosted by Nick Anzalone next Wednesday, Feb. 26, 5:30 - 6:30 PM, at 142 Eastern Ave, St. J. I expect to be there too.

### Feb 13

One topic this week.

The Energy & Technology Committee on Tuesday completed several weeks of work on the Global Warming Solutions Act, H.688. We approved it on a vote of 7 to 2.

Just before the planned vote, we took testimony from the Administration's Secretary of Natural Resources, the Agency that is charged with regulating pollution among other things. The Secretary presented a nearly complete re-write of the bill, although she was working from an earlier version. Later versions already incorporated several of the Administration's changes, and we added another at the Secretary's suggestion. Other ideas ran contrary to the intent of the Committee.

However, the Secretary made clear that the Administration backs the overall effort to address greenhouse gas emissions and resilience and adaptation in the face of climate change. At least one of the two "no" votes also hopes to support the bill after the Senate makes its changes.

The bill lays the foundation of the State's response to climate change. It creates a Climate Council, made up of Agency heads and chaired by the Secretary of Administration, and including 14 experts in various topic areas to be appointed by the Legislature (who would not be members of the Legislature). The Council conducts research and analysis, and crafts a Climate Action Plan.

The Agency of Natural Resources then drafts rules to implement the Plan. ANR already has significant rule-making authority to regulate pollutants; this bill gives it specific requirements to meet. Where ANR, or VTrans or Ag or other agency, lacks rule-making authority, they will have to come back to the Legislature for authorization. Where fees are to be imposed or raised, they will have to be approved by the Legislature.

The "specific requirements to meet" include taking longstanding State greenhouse gas reduction targets— which we are not hitting — and making them binding obligations. Requirements also include assessing the extent of our climate resilience and adaptation, setting improvement targets, and developing guidance to achieve them.

Both requirements are vital. Vermont has a responsibility to rein in our emissions. Following Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, Governor Scott joined 23 states to form the United States Climate Alliance, committing Vermont to meet the Paris goals. Further, public officials have a responsibility to formulate an effective response to the impacts of climate change in our State and communities. It's happening now, and it's accelerating.

Please join me to discuss this or any other issue, 9:00 AM, first and third Saturdays (same days as the Farmer's Market) at Kitchen Counter Cafe, 378 Railroad St., St. Johnsbury.

—Scott Campbell

## Feb 6

Wednesday, Feb 5, the House failed to override the Governor's veto of Paid Family Leave Insurance (H.107). Override requires 2/3 majority, or 100 votes; we were able to muster 99 votes. In my view, this was a setback for working families.

Many employers are not able to offer paid leave. When their employees need to care for ailing family members, or are welcoming a new baby, it's often stressful for both worker and boss. Workers have to choose between needed earnings and their loved ones; employers have to work around distracted, and sometimes absent, employees. Sometimes it's too much and workers leave or lose their jobs.

The Governor and other opponents focused on the \$30 million statewide value of the program, rather than the "premium" cost to individual workers for this insurance. The employee's cost

would have amounted to \$1 per \$500 income — for which employers had the option to pay some or all.

Certainly even 0.2% could be significant for folks who need every dollar. But those same folks now will lose much more money if and when they have to take days off work as unpaid family leave. Had the bill become law, every working Vermonter would have qualified for up to 90% of their average weekly wage. It's a bitter disappointment.

In other news, my committee, Energy & Technology is nearing the end of markup on the Global Warming Solutions Act, H.688. Next we will vote it out and send it on to Appropriations, since we are proposing adding three positions at Agency of Natural Resources to carry out the work.

Testimony has helped make the bill better and more balanced in its focus on both greenhouse gas reductions (relatively easy to measure) and improvements in adaptation, resilience and economic development (there are measurements, if less obvious ones). We are excited to be crafting the foundation of Vermont's climate crisis response efforts, as climate change accelerates in coming years.

Tidbits:

At a dinner meeting with VT State Employees Assoc a couple weeks ago I learned that the statewide Dept of Corrections staff logged almost 300,000 hours overtime between July 2018 and December 2019. That astonishing statistic reveals much: how overworked and stressed the current employees are; how over-incarceration is not working; how difficult it is to hire people; perhaps even how the rhetoric of "holding the line" or even cutting state government clashes with reality.

The Secretary of State's office, in collaboration with other state agencies, is building a one-stop shop website to help businesses access all state regulations and assistance in a single application process. A vendor has been selected who will use Salesforce, a leader in customer-service software. Roll-out will be in stages starting later this year.

Next coffee hour meeting at Kitchen Counter Cafe: Next Saturday, Feb 15, 9:00 AM.

### Jan 30

It's been a packed week of testimony in Energy & Technology on the Global Warming Solutions Act, H.688. State Treasurer Beth Pearce and Attorney General TJ Donovan both support the bill and offered minor tweaks. Former Secretary of VTrans and Irene Recovery head Sue Minter, and former Green Mtn Power CEO Mary Powell offered suggestions. Sugarbush president Win Smith, and managers of a similar Act in Massachusetts. We also heard from State Economist Tom Kavet, and VT Forest Products lobbyist Ed Larson. Packed!

We hope to hone suggested amendments and vote out our final bill sometime next week. Then it goes to the House floor, hopefully passes (it should, with 87 co-sponsors), and on to the Senate. Self-government is slow, on purpose.

Tuesday was 2<sup>nd</sup> annual NEK Day at the Statehouse. There was a great showing from a huge variety of organizations — over a hundred of our NEK neighbors. In E&T we heard an update on the NEK Broadband effort (26 towns will vote whether to join on Town Meeting Day). I only got to hear a couple of other presentations. A standout was Jody Fried of Catamount Arts, who gave the House Commerce & Economic Development a strong and eloquent message of the power of arts, recreation and education to drive economic development. Kudos to Katherine Sims and the NEK Collaborative for organizing such a great day!



This coming Saturday, Feb. 1, is another of my coffee hours at 9:00 AM at Kitchen Counter Cafe, 378 Railroad St, St. J. Again, I'm doing these on the first and third Saturdays of the month, to coincide with the winter Farmer's Market. Please join me to discuss any issues you wish!

### Jan 23

This week we heard Governor Scott's budget address. He again emphasized demographics as the major crisis facing Vermont. He discussed a number of initiatives he believes will help address it. He also said his administration's \$6.3 billion budget (one-third of which is Federal dollars) is held to 2% overall increase, and that he would not support any revenue increases.

The demographic problem — more older, retirees supported by fewer people working — is going to get worse before it gets better. The question is, what will attract and retain younger working families: lower taxes and fewer services; or strategic investments in ongoing needs such as education, transportation and housing, and long-deferred needs such as broadband and responding to the climate crisis.

The Energy & Technology Committee is working hard on the Global Warming Solutions Act, H.688. We've taken testimony from diverse sources: Regulatory Assistance Project (an international consultancy); The Nature Conservancy (regarding resiliency and forests); VT Council on Rural Development; UVM professor of economics, Jon Erickson; VT League of Cities & Towns; Agency of Natural Resources. There is much work to do.

The Budget Adjustment Act, a true-up of the current FY20 budget, passed on unanimous voice vote. House Appropriations is now hard at work on the FY21 budget.

The compromise Paid Family & Medical Leave Insurance Act, H.107, passed the Senate 20-9, and is being debated on the House floor on Thursday (Jan 23). Most employees will pay a premium of 0.02%, or \$1 per \$500 gross wages, and will be eligible for partial wage replacement when taking time off work to care for a new or ailing family member. Medical leave benefits would be voluntary and at an additional premium.

This bill is far from perfect — all other modern economies have a benefit like this, actually much more generous than this. Yet, as the partner of a hospice and palliative caregiver, I regularly hear heartbreaking stories of families stressed and struggling to care for loved ones. The bill passed 89-58, and I voted in favor.

A compromise Minimum Wage Act, S.23, is expected to be on the House floor Friday. The compromise here retreats from the \$15 per hour goal over 5 or more years. The new goal is \$11.75 in 2021, and \$12.55 in 2022; future raises would be based on inflation. Even the compromise goals may be challenging for some small businesses. But for Medicaid-reimbursed programs and most businesses, the reduced goal is easier to cope with. Again, it's not perfect, but on balance, I have decided to support it. We can't continue to base our economy on underpaying people.

Please come to the NEK Chamber's Legislative Breakfast at the St. Johnsbury House on Monday, Jan. 27, at 8:00 AM.

Also join me for coffee and further discussion (so many details left out here!) at the Kitchen Counter Cafe, 378 Railroad St., St. Johnsbury, Saturday, Feb. 1, at 9:00 AM.

## Jan 16

St. Johnsbury neighbors,

Picking up where I left off last week: Governor Scott's State of the State message last Thursday was interrupted for 15 minutes or more by (mostly) young people protesting what they perceive as lack of action on the climate crisis. I was impressed with the Governor's and leadership's low-key response.

My response was, while sympathetic with the message, it would have been more effectively delivered had they chosen to stop after a few minutes, sat down and announced, "We're scared and we're angry. Thank you for listening."

In fact, working out what is the appropriate response to the climate crisis, in light of Vermont's other challenges, is very much in front of the legislature.

Last Friday, my committee, Energy & Technology, walked through the Global Warming Solutions Act, H.688 (look up at [legislature.vermont.gov](http://legislature.vermont.gov)). It's too much to describe here, but I will say it is carefully thought out and very well crafted. It addresses limiting greenhouse gas emissions, but also issues of adaptation, resilience, and affordability, which I believe should be at the core of Vermont's action.

This week a further flurry of bills have been introduced, with a small flurry hitting my committee.

We heard on Wednesday from the Climate & Health program manager at the Dept. of Health. The presentation described health effects from climate change that Vermont is already experiencing, such as increases in vector-borne disease (ticks and mosquitos) and water-borne disease (algae blooms, contamination from heavy rain and floods), and increased heat stress on vulnerable individuals.

We also heard a presentation on Efficiency Vermont's report on Energy Burden, which is the portion of household income spent on heating, transportation and electricity. It won't surprise you that, on average, St. Johnsbury residents experience a high energy burden. Bringing those costs down — and household income up — is important to our town's long-term viability.

Two big issues from last year, Minimum Wage and Paid Family Leave, are in conference committee.

I will hold another "coffee hour" this coming Saturday, Jan. 18, at 9:00 AM, at Kitchen Counter Cafe.

## Jan 9

St. Johnsbury neighbors,

This is the first of what I intend to be a brief weekly update of doings at the Legislature.

The second session of the biennium began on Tuesday. House leadership indicates that minimum wage (H.107) and paid family leave (S.23), both of which stalled at the end of the first session last May, will be brought to a vote soon. As details are finalized, I will post more information on my website, [CampbellForVermont.com](http://CampbellForVermont.com).

My committee, Energy & Technology, heard testimony this week regarding cybersecurity, forest management for carbon sequestration and storage; electric energy storage; issues around electric utilities providing broadband services; and the proposed Global Warming Solutions Act, which updates greenhouse emission goals and makes them required instead of aspirational.

Governor Scott also is delivering his State of the State message Thursday (after this writing).

There was a good turnout at my first Saturday coffee hour, so I will continue as planned: first and third Saturdays, 9:00 AM, Kitchen Counter Cafe, Railroad St, St. J. Next meeting, Sat., Jan. 18. Please drop me an email if you plan to join me so I can advise the owners in case there will be a crowd. I look forward to talking with you.

—Scott Campbell