

Rep. Scott Campbell

Honor and Integrity

Keeping one's word is the kind of thing that would be listed in "All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten."

Sadly it seems some members of the U.S. Senate skipped kindergarten. The sheer hypocrisy on display this week was breathtaking, as they fast-tracked their election-year nomination after stonewalling another four years ago.

I'm deeply saddened by this. It cheapens the hard work most public servants — of both parties — put into their jobs. It undermines the legitimacy of our institutions. It feeds the cynicism many voters feel about their government.

Vermont is different, we like to say. Still, even here legislators are often held in low esteem. As I started my service two years ago, it was gratifying to find how dedicated and diligent almost all members are.

I include in that many from the other party. In particular, I think of my committee-mates, Reps. Mark Higley of Lowell and Heidi Scheuermann of Stowe, whose policy views I may not share, but whose passion and engagement I cannot help but admire.

I think of Reps. Anne Donahue of Northfield and Jim Harrison of Chittenden, with whom I serve on ad-hoc policy caucuses.

I think of Reps. Peter Fagan of Rutland City and Butch Shaw of Pittsford, who often ask penetrating, constructive questions in debate.

My own party leaders would probably prefer I not call out these members of the other "team," some of whom have election opponents from "my side."

Yet I think it's important, even on the eve of the election, and especially in these hyper-polarized times, that we recognize our common goals. It may be overused, but it's profoundly true, that what unites us is far greater than what divides us.

We all share the goal of a sustainable rural economy. We all want an engaged and productive citizenry. We all seek to rebuild community.

The question is how. This is where voters have a choice to make.

Some say "affordability" is the key. As I have observed before, what I hear in that word is a veiled call to reduce taxes and spending.

Cutting taxes sounds appealing, which is why you hear it especially at election time. But it's a sugar high, not a balanced diet. An austerity budget, in fact, would do more harm than good.

My view is that our crisis, in St. Johnsbury and rural Vermont, is an aging population, leading to a smaller workforce and shrinking tax base.

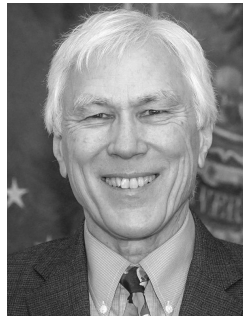
Real long-term affordability requires rebalancing our population by attracting and retaining more working families. That means targeting more resources to broadband, childcare, education, State Colleges, housing, healthcare, the energy transition, and arts and recreation, among other critical investments.

Oddly, many who call for lower taxes also support these investments — which reinforces my suspicion that "no new taxes" is more election slogan than serious policy proposal.

Pulling the curtain back on the "affordability" argument is not the same thing as calling for more taxes. No one is doing that, nor were there any substantive tax changes this past biennium. To say otherwise transforms a cheap slogan into something worse — maybe not as hypocritical as some U.S. Senators, but still not very honorable.

Regardless of your policy views, you should know I work hard to advocate for local concerns, understand statewide issues, engage with and reach compromise with opponents, and communicate clearly and carefully with the public. That's what I look for in a State Rep, and what I strive to provide my community and my State.

In the long run, performing that role — and living life — with honor and integrity is what is most important. We all should have learned that in kindergarten.



PAID COMMENTARY

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