

Viewpoints. . .Yours and ours

Letters

Composting field trip

To the Editor:

Have you ever wondered what happens with the leaf litter, grass clippings and other yard waste that folks drop off at the local recycling depot?

In Bradford, the Highway Department periodically hauls it to Cookeville Composting in Corinth. There it gets mixed with food waste that owner/operator Bob Sandberg collects from area restaurants, residential facilities, youth camps and grocery stores. Mixed together in the proper proportions of nitrogen-based and carbon-based, it heats up and gets broken down by microorganisms. Bob turns the piles periodically to keep them well oxygenated, and in time the end-product is a nutrient rich soil additive that gardeners love because it boosts the health and productivity of veggie plants.

Join us on a field trip with a purpose to Cookeville Composting on Sunday, Sept. 27 at 2 p.m. Witness first-hand the large-scale composting process at the Sandberg Farm in Corinth. You might be amazed to see the developmental phases that organic materials, like food scraps go through to become a nutrient-laden product that looks like rich dark soil.

We will meet at the Park and Ride at the intersection of Chelsea Road and carpool or caravan the 7 miles to the Sandberg Farm on Abe Jacobs Road in Corinth.

Nancy Jones, co-chair
Bradford Conservation Commission

Time for Independence in Vermont

To the Editor:

As I've been campaigning, people often ask me: "Why are you running as an Independent?"

If you've followed my platform, you know that I support empowering local governments, because government functions best when it is closest to the people that it serves and has the capacity to get the job done. I support fiscal responsibility, because the cost of living in Vermont is making it too difficult for working families to build a future here. I support criminal justice reform because people deserve to feel safe in their homes and businesses. I support open and transparent decision-making that is responsive to constituents and that doesn't turn every aspect of our lives into another opportunity for private gain.

I believe in equal treatment under the law and that it is not government's place to dictate your most private personal choices. I support conservation of open space and wildlife, and providing healthy outdoor recreational opportunities for communities.

Let's be honest: in Vermont these issues, taken together, do not find a ready home in either political party.

Nor has our current political leadership in Vermont been doing a bang-up job on any of those things. The state legislature has been controlled by the Democrats for decades. Republican Phil Scott has had control of state agency leadership and priorities for over 12 years.

What we've gotten out of that is ballooning costs of government services and education, a sputtering economy, rising property taxes, lack of accountability, local decisions being overruled by unelected bureaucrats, lawmakers who are more focused on party politics than getting work done, and vibes-based policymaking that does not lead to real-world outcomes.

Look at some of the things that have happened in our district over this past decade. An unelected regional planning commission has been empowered to override local planning and stifle small business and economic opportunity, and the state is "solving" affordable housing for working people by setting huge housing targets for our rural villages that cannot possibly be served with roads, water and sewer — all so that larger, wealthier towns can preserve idyllic "community character."

Our governor took Newbury to the Vermont Supreme Court to overturn a local planning decision and force us to accept a privatized correctional facility that would have loaded huge costs and risks on the town, while consolidation schemes look to take schools out of our communities while actually increasing, not decreasing, costs for rural towns. Look at our latest school budget proposals — administrative costs are out of control, an increasing number of our students are on individual special needs plans even as outcomes get worse, and tax rates in our district are rising significantly in comparison to wealthier communities.

I don't know about everyone else, but it is hard for me not to feel frustrated and let down by the current system. Everyday people watch the pendulum swing, again and again, from the Rs to the Ds to the Rs again, and nothing ever seems to change. The problems continue to fester. The struggle to make ends meet gets harder.

When people ask me "why are you running as an Independent?" — it is a question that is often asked with an anxious look. Behind the question is fear — that by voting for a highly-qualified candidate motivated to tackle the deep-rooted problems facing the state, the "other team" might win. That I'll be a "spoiler." Spoil what, exactly? Both of those "teams" have been winning for years. We're still not getting anywhere.

I'm asked about "party loyalty," with concern about who I would caucus with if I were to be elected to the state house, and whether I would be "reliable" in advocating or supporting a particular party's interests. And right there — that is the problem in a nutshell. It strikes at the very heart of what is wrong with our politics, and why there is so much dysfunction. Instead of concern about how leaders will deliver on real-world policies to improve life for the people in the district, an election comes down to whose "side" I'll be on. Because it's all about sides. Party over competence. Party over community. Party over country.

I have not committed to caucus with either party, nor have I sought any endorsements from special interest groups. If given the opportunity to serve, I would prefer to form coalitions with likeminded lawmakers — from whatever side of the aisle they may be on — regarding the issues that are most important to the people of this district.

That is the point of being an independent, of remaining unaffiliated with either party. Elected officials should represent all members of their district to the best of their ability, and do what is right for the communities they are serving — regardless of what their political affiliation is or their choices at the ballot box. Right at this moment, our two-party system, in both America and Vermont, no longer allows for that. It locks candidates into an ideological box, enforces conformity, and prioritizes party discipline over practical leadership. I've had enough. Haven't you?

Change starts small, but it has to start somewhere. We have a chance to make a different choice this year in Orange Caledonia. Vote Independent.

Susan Culp
Newbury, VT

The writer is a candidate to represent Orange-Caledonia in the Vermont House of Representatives.

More than meets the eye

To the Editor:

Most of us have prejudices, many of which we are not even aware of. I am no different. So, when I heard that a young man, who was not even old enough to vote, was running for state office, I dismissed his candidacy out of hand. But then I caught myself, examined my prejudice for what it was, and decided to withhold my judgement until I met him.

Following a door knock, Aiden Otterman spent the best part of an hour with my wife and I at our kitchen table, discussing the issues facing our community and his reasons for running for the Vermont House. At the conclusion of that discussion, I decided to support Aiden's run for office.

What stands out to me about Aiden is his focus on the everyday concerns that matter to Vermonters, like keeping our communities affordable, supporting working families and small businesses, protecting opportunities for young people, supporting affordable health care, and making sure that rural Vermont has a strong voice in Montpelier.

I appreciate that Aiden approaches these issues with a practical, independent-minded perspective. To me, good representation means listening carefully, taking local concerns seriously, and being willing to work toward solutions rather than simply falling into partisan arguments.

My support for Aiden also comes from the values I want to see reflected in our state government, which include accountability, common sense, respect for taxpayers, and a commitment to the communities that make Vermont such a special place. I want a representative who understands that decisions made in Montpelier have real consequences for families, farms, businesses, and communities all across our state.

I was also impressed with Aiden's plainness about his positions and his commitment to them. In our conversation, he was never vague with his answers to my questions. His answers were always specific and unapologetic, backed by a clear commitment to the people that make up our community.

I am, and have been for some time, an independent voter. I am less swayed by party labels, and more interested in candidate quality. That's why I support Aiden Otterman for the Vermont House. Regardless of his age, he is clearly the kind of leader we need in Montpelier. I have no doubt that he would bring a thoughtful, informed, and grounded voice to the legislature and would work hard to represent the people of our community.

Dana Caldarone
Newbury, VT

Decades spent solving problems

To the Editor:

I'm writing this to urge the voters of Orange County to re-elect my friend, Senator John Benson, to the Vermont State Senate.

I have known John for many years, first through the Brookfield Fire Department, I served with him, and most recently, accompanying him by visiting Orange County selectboards.

John has spent his career solving problems — nearly 50 years working as a civil engineer at Dubois & King in Randolph, 35 years on the Brookfield Fire Department (28 of those years as the chief), 16 years on the Brookfield Selectboard (many as selectboard chair).

John has common sense and is fiscally responsible.

You must admire someone who can be called up several days before the opening of the 2026 legislative session, with no previous state political experience, and heading to Montpelier, learn the ropes, and fit into political life.

I urge any voter of Orange County, who is concerned with the future of Vermont, to do some research on Senator Benson, and vote for him this fall.

Michael J. McPhetres
Tunbridge, VT

FIBERARTS NIGHT

WOODSVILLE—Haverhill Parks & Recreation hold Fiber Arts Community Meetings every Friday from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Clifford Memorial Building on South Court Street in Woodsville. The meeting is an informal, community-focused event where attendees bring handiwork projects such as knitting, crocheting, weaving, quilting, embroidery, sewing, mending etc. People socialize, craft, help each other with advice, project troubleshooting or just a cup of tea. All are welcome.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

GROTON—Throughout Sept., The Re-Treasured Community Closet is collecting closed-toe shoes and socks of all sizes to benefit community members. Please, no sandals. The Re-Treasured Community Closet is located at 1334 Scott Highway, Units B & D in Groton.

Join me in supporting Susan Culp

To the Editor:

I'm encouraging voters in Newbury, Groton and Topsham to take the time and effort to get to know Susan Culp and her positions on issues affecting Vermonters that need thoughtful solutions before voting in the House race for our district.

I've worked with Susan as a part of various boards and committees over the past several years and have found her to be open-minded, fair, detail-oriented and a tireless worker with a goal of 'getting it done' without prejudice.

Given the fact that rural Vermonters are at a real disadvantage with the Chittenden County majority in the legislature, we need representatives that have the experience and skills to counter the weight coming down from that voting bloc on so many issues. Susan espouses the Vermont tradition of independence, not choosing to run under a party tag and I believe she is the right person to represent us in the Statehouse at this time.

Marvin Harrison
Newbury, VT

Vermont is worth fighting for

To the Editor:

Deb and I just celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary on June 28 this year which offers an informed perspective on the person she is. I thought I would share just a few of the many reasons I support her reelection for the Caledonia-1 House seat for Barnet, Ryegate, and Waterford.

Montpelier desperately needs more people like Deb that understand Vermont's history and what's needed to get back to a place we can live and be proud of. We still have much of Vermont's beauty, but sadly rural Vermont is becoming a place that is unaffordable, unsafe, and a shell of its former greatness.

Deb and I met at Vermont Tech back in 1984, both ag students that loved our family farms and wanted to pursue that life together. Deb even milked the cows with her dad the morning of our wedding!

Deb is a hard worker. She is honest and will do what is right no matter the circumstance or the easiest route. She has courage and integrity at the highest level. She understands issues and works to find solutions to problems rather than be a follower. Whether it was raising our family, farming, or owning a small business, Deb has proven time and time again how to figure out what works to get things done and not necessarily just do what the 'experts' are saying you should do.

Deb finishes what she starts and gets things done the right way. She is a lifelong Vermonter and the third generation from her family (father and grandfather) to serve as a House Representative. Deb is not a politician but rather has good instincts and what I call 'real-world experience' common sense.

Deb is a real Vermonter when it comes to farming, she understands Vermont agriculture and what it means to be a landowner. Our entire family loves the Vermont outdoors and all that it offers. Deb 100% knows the value of Vermont's traditions, its landscape and how important protecting our farms and resources is to make Vermont special.

Deb has also been beside me as we have grown The Powers Agency into a multi-state award-winning insurance business serving the Northeast and most recently Wisconsin. Working with families and business owners provides her with firsthand perspective and understanding of the struggles and challenges we are all facing.

Deb is a woman of strong faith that she lives daily. She's a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, and neighbor who loves everyone. She is a giver that has cooked countless meals for people and events, coached/taught students and volunteered more times and in more ways than I could even start to mention. I am very proud of all she has done and accomplished but even more for the kind of person she always has been and is today.

Deb and I are grateful and blessed to have the opportunities to live, farm, raise a family, and operate a business in the state we love. We both want those opportunities for all our children and grandchildren. We want folks to be able to retire and not have to move because it's unaffordable.

Deb knows what this means and is willing to put the effort in for our communities to keep these dreams alive for everyone. I urge all of you to take time to Vote for Deb in our General Election Nov. 3.

Kevin Powers
Waterford, VT

More letters on page A5

Rambling Reflections

Bigger does not mean better

by Nessa Flax

It all starts the same way.

A big corporation buys a smaller — but highly successful — company, which has loyal customers. The big boys then proceed to cut corners on production or ingredients to increase profits.

As is evident on multiple websites recording customer comments, consumers are later left wondering why a favorite ice cream no longer tastes the same. Or why a toothpaste happily used for decades suddenly causes an upset stomach.

It appears that enough people have been frustrated by such experiences that there is now a proliferation of resources anxious to give you explanations.

I recently went down this rabbit hole on YouTube. Tempted by "This Is Not Ice Cream!" I meandered through "Best and Worst Breads," "Fake Cheddar," and more.

Then, because YouTube is not generally a legitimate research source, I searched for alternatives. I must say, my respect for YouTube is much higher after finding additional, more formal studies.

Beginning with ice cream, AI got me started with this general statement: "Not

all ice cream is ice cream. Seventy percent of what's in your freezer aisle is frozen dairy dessert — loaded with vegetable oils, corn syrup and chemical stabilizers."

In order to qualify as ice cream, the FDA requires 10% milkfat, 20% total milk solids, and the final product must be at least half air and half actual mass by volume. Products that do not meet these thresholds cannot legally be called ice cream and must be labeled as frozen dairy dessert.

Even if they meet the 10% milkfat threshold, some brands' ingredients may still include corn syrup, carrageenan, or mono- and diglycerides all of which will change the taste and texture.

In a variety of assessments, Tillamook is one of the most highly rated ice creams. It comes from a farmer-owned cooperative in Oregon, and has for over a century. As one evaluation explains, "... it stands out because it uses more cream and less air than the legal standard requires, creating a richer, heavier texture than many mass-market brands."

The first time I tasted Tillamook, I realized this was what ice cream tasted like when I was a kid. Oh, so creamy!

Who would imagine that the recipe for toothpaste could change?

A controlling stake (84%) in Tom's of Maine was bought by Colgate-Palmolive in 2006. I have been using Tom's for decades. A few months ago I bought a new tube, smaller than previous tubes. But that wasn't the worst part.

The minute I put the brush in my mouth, I knew they had newly added stevia to the formula. Stevia comes from an herbal shrub in the sunflower family native to South America, thus it is considered a "natural ingredient."

Stevia is 200 to 400 times sweeter than table sugar. Can that possibly taste "natural"? Not to me ... nor to many other customers who have complained about the bitter aftertaste.

While being offered huge amounts of money from a corporation — \$100 million in Tom's case — would be difficult to say "no" to, that doesn't mean the money will buy happiness. Since the buyout, there have been two class action suits filed against Tom's. One was settled for \$2.9 million, the other is ongoing.

Sometimes, smaller *is* better.