



PRIMARY ELECTION GUIDE

A Special Publication of the Addison Independent

August 6, 2026



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Get to know the issues that matter most before you cast your vote.

The Addy Indy offers exclusive coverage of Addison County candidates that will appear on the primary and general election ballots, so our readers can enter polls informed about who is running and what their priorities are.

Our coverage leading up to the general election will include

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- Full election results from primary and general elections.

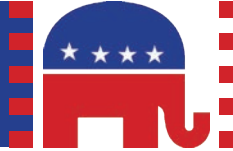
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GOP Senate



On the Republican Primary Election ballot in Addison County you will see the following candidates in a competitive race for State Senate. Three are running, the top two vote getters advance to the General Election.

Incumbent Heffernan seeks a second term as our state senator

By MARIN HOWELL

BRISTOL — Reflecting on his first term serving in the Vermont Senate, Bristol Republican Steven Heffernan feels positively about the work he and his fellow legislators accomplished.

"I believe it went very well," Heffernan said of his past two years in the Legislature's upper chamber. "From Act 181 to other bills that we had, a greater majority of Republicans made a difference to affect how it's going to affect Vermont (on) certain issues of too much taxes or too much regulation."

Heffernan was one of several Republican challengers to unseat Democratic incumbents in the Legislature back in 2024. In the Addison District, which encompasses all Addison County towns plus Rochester, Huntington and Buel's Gore, Heffernan beat out then incumbent state Sen. Chris Bray, a Bristol Democrat, in the November 2024 general election.

He also beat Huntington Republican Landel Cochran, but was bested by long-time incumbent Sen. Ruth Hardy, D-Middlebury in this two-seat district.

For the past two years, Heffernan has served on the Senate Agriculture and Education committees. He highlighted some of the legislation tackled during his first term, including work related to Act 181. That legislation was originally passed in 2024 and aimed at overhauling Vermont's land use and development law, Act 250. This past legislative session, lawmakers repealed portions of Act 181 (through Act 152) following pushback and concerns raised by rural landowners and other stakeholders.

"From Act 181 to other bills that we had, a greater majority of Republicans made a difference to affect how it's going to affect Vermont (on) certain issues of too much taxes or too much regulation."

— Steve Heffernan

Heffernan also pointed to work on this year's miscellaneous ag bill, legislation banning the use and sale of herbicide paraquat in Vermont unless authorized and an act prohibiting civil arrests in sensitive locations like schools. He shared some of the things he learned during his first term as a state senator.

"I think the biggest thing any legislator learns the first couple years there is where the real, for lack of a better word, power is that makes decisions," Heffernan said. "Even though you're representing your county or district, that there are certain powers there that call the shots."

Heffernan said he felt honored to serve in the state senate and that one of his



STEVE HEFFERNAN

favorite parts of the job has been hearing from constituents. While he noted he isn't always able to resolve those concerns, helping constituents find answers they're (See Heffernan, Page 5)

Challengers

Klein stresses growth in state Senate bid

By JOHN FLOWERS

NEW HAVEN — Andrew Klein has gotten great satisfaction through public service on the Middlebury Fire Department (MFD).

Now he'd like to help extinguish some of the state's problems as one of two state senators representing Addison County, Rochester, Huntington and Buel's Gore.

Klein, a 48-year-old New Haven Republican, joins a field of candidates that includes incumbent state Sens. Ruth Hardy, D-Middlebury and Steve Heffernan, R-Bristol; Leicester Democrat Hannah Sessions; and Orwell Republican Andrea Treadway.

Heffernan, Klein and Treadway will vie in an Aug. 11 GOP primary to decide which two will advance to the Nov. 3 general election.

"Politics is always something I thought I would eventually end up doing, with my skillset and background," Klein said.

It's a background steeped in numbers. Klein grew up in New York City, though his family has had a long connection in Vermont. The family would make frequent trips to his late grandparents' home in South Ryegate in the Northeast Kingdom. Klein's dad acquired a farm in Norwich.

After attending high school in New Hampshire, Klein enrolled at the University of Vermont, eventually transferring to Middlebury College for his junior and senior years (1999-2001). He served on the MFD during that time.

"That group of people (on MFD) is really what formed my love for Middlebury and Vermont," Klein said.



ANDREW KLEIN

Following college, Klein circled back to New York to become an investment banker on Wall Street for three years. He then attended law and business schools, earning a joint JD-MBA at NYU. He joined the NYU School of Law board of trustees in 2016 and continues to serve.

"I think there's a false equivalency that being pro-business is antithetical to keeping Vermont, Vermont. You can have both."

— Andrew Klein

Following law school, he launched what he called "a series of real estate investment companies."

In 2018, Andrew and his wife Ashleigh looked for a new place to raise their family, which includes son Lockwood, now 7, and daughter Fielding, 7. Both Andrew and Ashleigh had ties to Vermont, so the landing spot wasn't difficult to pick.

"Vermont very much felt like where we (See Klein, Page 4)

Orwell's Treadway seeks GOP Senate seat

By JOHN FLOWERS

ORWELL — Orwell selectboard Chair Andrea Treadway is seeking one of the two state Senate seats representing Addison County, Huntington, Rochester and Buel's Gore, and will be a candidate on the Republican primary ballot on Aug. 11.

Treadway joins incumbent Sen. Steve Heffernan of Bristol and New Haven's Andrew Klein as the three Republicans in the race. The Democratic field is incumbent Sen. Ruth Hardy of Middlebury and Salisbury's Hannah Sessions.

This will be Treadway's second state Senate bid. Motivated by efforts to improve the fortune of dairy and fruit farmers, she competed in 2010 (as Andrea Ochs) in a five-way race.

"(Former U.S.) Sen. Jim Jeffords, R-Vt., inspired me to run for (the state Legislature)," she recalled. "I felt there was so much going on, and I was so active in the agricultural community and saw all the stuff that needed to be fixed. In my naiveté, I thought I was going to go to Montpelier and change the world."

Treadway finished out of the running in that 2010 race, though she was heartened by having captured 15% of the vote.

And in retrospect, she said she's glad she didn't win a seat back then; her two daughters were 8 and 10 years old at the time. Spending four- to five months in Montpelier each year would've required her to miss a lot of quality family time and volunteer opportunities.

Sixteen years later, Treadway believes she's in a much better place in her



ANDREA TREADWAY

life to serve. She's well-established as a bookkeeper. She's reestablished herself in civic affairs, as leader of the Orwell selectboard, vice chair of the

"I believe you should always serve your community and do it to the best of your ability without any preconceived notions."

— Andrea Treadway

Addison County Regional Planning Commission's Transportation Advisory Committee, and as a member of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) board.

"I've always had a passion for government and public service," Treadway said. "I believe you should

always serve your community and do it to the best of your ability without any preconceived notions."

She's still concerned about the plight of the state's farmers, but she enters the (See Treadway, Page 4)

Klein

(Continued from Page 3)

wanted to be,” Klein said.

Upon his return, he quickly rejoined the MFD, now serving as a lieutenant. While he lives in neighboring New Haven, his past service in Middlebury allowed him to be reinstated. He specialized in technical rescue operations.

“I’ve been involved in helping the fire department update and modernize some of its systems. When I see something that isn’t working, I roll up my sleeves and say, ‘Let’s fix it.’”

He said he wants to bring that same approach to Montpelier and began considering a foray into politics around three years ago. Klein ultimately picked ’26 as his electoral debut and — after consulting with GOP strategists — decided to run for state Senate.

“I wanted to go where I thought I could make the most amount of impact,” Klein said. “That, for me, was being in the Senate.”

If elected, Klein said he’d support efforts to quickly grow Vermont’s population and business sector, which he believes are key to getting the state on a financially sustainable path.

“I only see one way out for Vermont,” he said. “If you look at all the issues — whether it’s housing, education, health care, affordability, taxes,” they’re all tied to one thing: Vermont doesn’t have enough revenue coming in. It needs more people paying income taxes and corporate taxes.

“We need a bigger pie; we can’t keep trying to divide up the same small pie to fix the problems Vermont has,” he added. “It’s like trying to get blood from a stone. It will not work.”

Klein believes Vermont must make itself more inviting to housing developers and entrepreneurs if it’s to grow municipal grand lists. Based on his experience, he said Vermont could ratchet up its growth by injecting more predictability into the development process.

How would he do that?

- By supporting the creation of an economic development team — made up of state officials who would have the governor’s ear — that could meet with folks pitching promising business ventures.
- By supporting Vermont’s adoption of “form-based codes” for considering building projects. “It’s not just Act 250, it’s also the way the system was designed,” he said. “There’s so much agency cost in the process — even if your project falls outside of Act 250. It’s incredibly

laborious and expensive.”

Those willing to invest capital don’t like uncertainty, Klein stressed.

“Our process (in Vermont) is that even once you buy a piece of property, you don’t really know what you can do with it until you go through a process afterwards,” he said. “I would say it makes significantly more sense to come up with a number we all agree with in the state… We’re not going to develop 70% of the state. But for the 30% we are going to develop, we’re going to know what you’re going to be able to do with that property on day one.”

Once it decides where it’s appropriate to build, Vermont must start considering much larger housing projects than are typically granted these days.

“The deal sizes are unfortunately too small right now,” Klein said. “There’s lots of capital that might want to come into the state and invest in the state, but if the deal sizes are so small… it means less capital can come into the state.”

— Andrew Klein

Klein shared his views on other Vermont challenges, including:

EDUCATION

Vermont ranks in the top four nationally in public education spending per student, yet student outcomes currently rank 14th in the country, according to a recent report. Klein pointed to Vermont’s dwindling student population as a major part of the problem.

“We’ve lost 20% of our K-12 population in the last 20 years. Young people can’t afford to stay — they can’t find housing and jobs. We need to get them paying into the system, and staying,” he said.

Again, he said more housing and jobs is key to attracting more taxpayers and building a school system that will deliver improved student outcomes.

HEALTH CARE

Vermont’s health care system has been in crisis, with rising premiums that are a product of a shrinking pool of folks with private insurance. The state’s aging population is leaning into Medicare and Medicaid.

He’d also like to see Vermont try to partner with Maine and/or New Hampshire to see if it could increase its insurance pool to enhance affordability.

More young families would also drive premiums down. Klein believes a building boom and preserving Vermont’s pastoral ethos aren’t mutually exclusive.

“I think there’s a false equivalency that being pro-business is antithetical to keeping Vermont, Vermont. You can have both.”

Treadway

(Continued from Page 3)

2026 Senate campaign with a broader set of issues.

“I want to work across the aisle to create meaningful legislation to make Vermont affordable for *all* Vermonter,” she said. “The best way to do this is to listen to constituents and then craft responsible legislation in concert with the main contributors in that area.”

Treadway specifically cited healthcare, education, property taxes, housing and agriculture as sectors of the economy requiring financial relief.

For education reform, for example, she’d like to see representatives of the Agency of Education, Vermont Principals Association, teachers, parents, and students in the same room talking things out.

HEALTH CARE

Treadway has read the Vermont Healthcare 911 (VHC911) report and agrees with its recommendations and findings. VHC911 is a coalition that includes medical professionals, business leaders, school officials and rank-and-file Vermonters concerned about the rising costs of healthcare and its impacts on the wellbeing, quality of life and success of residents and the economic vitality of the state.

Like the VHC911 coalition, Treadway believes the Legislature has been taking steps to help the state’s healthcare industry cut costs. She hopes these advances — which include recent passage of Acts 68, 55 and 49 — translate into lower health insurance premiums for Vermonters, businesses and school systems.

“We need to work with hospitals, providers and insurance companies, as well as legislators across the aisle, to create meaningful legislation that will actually reduce the cost of health care,” Treadway said.

“In order to make education more affordable, we have to tackle health care,” she added, noting one of the most volatile line items for school districts.

What about universal primary care, a health care system that earned citizens’ backing at several Addison County town meetings this year?

“In theory, I’m a supporter of universal primary care. I think it’s a great idea,” Treadway said. “But in reality, I think

it’s going to be really hard — in a state our size — to be fiscally responsible and find a way to pay for it. Can we merge universal primary care with private pay?”

EDUCATION REFORM

While Treadway is on board with reducing education costs, she’s not sure Vermont’s Act 73 is the route we should take.

“I think (Act 73) is ambitious, there are a lot of different ways to make (spending) reductions, but I’m not sure everything in Act 73 is the way to do it. I really think we need to look at school choice, career centers and pathways after graduation that don’t necessarily include traditional college,” Treadway said. “Traditional college worked for my children, but it doesn’t work for everyone.”

Treadway believes local voters — as opposed to lawmakers and or the Agency of Education — should decide on possible school closures or consolidations.

“It’s not easy (to close a school),” Treadway said. “The school is the heart of a town.”

But she sees value in reducing the number of school districts as a means of shedding administrative costs. “We need to start there and let the (current) school districts do their jobs,” Treadway said.

She acknowledged that with declining enrollment and rising education costs, changes will be needed that aren’t “going to make everyone happy.”

HELP WHEN NEEDED

Treadway said she believes in helping Vermonters during rough stretches. She harkened back to an earlier time in her life when she was struggling to put food on the table and wondering if she could make her mortgage payment, in spite of working two jobs. CVOEO connected her to fuel assistance and 3SquaresVt benefits for around three months, she recalled.

“It was just enough to get me through the hardest time in my life,” she said, adding that when CVOEO subsequently asked her if she’d like to serve on its board, “I *ran* to it.”

Treadway lamented limited state reserves for safety-net programs amid current federal cuts.

“I will fight for programs that help Vermonters,” she said.



STATEWIDE CANDIDATES

The following candidates' names will appear on the Primary ballot for the parties indicated.
The incumbent is indicated by (inc). A contested race features a *

DEMOCRATIC BALLOT

Governor *	Amanda Janoo of Burlington
Governor *	Aly Richards of Montpelier
Lieutenant Governor *	Esther Charlestin of South Burlington
Lieutenant Governor *	Molly Gray of Burlington
Lieutenant Governor *	Ryan McLaren of Essex Junction City
State Treasurer	Mike Pieciak (inc) of Winooski
Secretary Of State	Sarah Copeland Hanzas (inc) of Bradford
Auditor Of Accounts*	Tim Ashe of Burlington
Auditor Of Accounts*	Nicholas Graeter of Williston
Auditor Of Accounts*	Dan Towle of Huntington
Attorney General	Charity R. Clark (inc) of Williston
U.S. Representative	Becca Balint (inc) of Brattleboro

PROGRESSIVE BALLOT

State Treasurer	Zachary Hampl of Rutland Town
Secretary Of State	Rachel Shaw of Bennington

REPUBLICAN BALLOT

Governor	Phil Scott (inc) of Berlin
Lieutenant Governor	John S. Rodgers (inc) of Glover
Attorney General	H. Brooke Paige of Washington
Auditor Of Accounts	H. Brooke Paige of Washington
State Treasurer	H. Brooke Paige of Washington
Secretary Of State	H. Brooke Paige of Washington
U.S. Representative	Mark Coester of Westminster
U.S. Representative	Gerald Malloy of Weathersfield

Heffernan

(Continued from Page 3)

looking for is one of the things he's enjoyed about the role.

"Being able to help out people that need help, no matter what their situation is you can be a liaison," he said.

There have been some times during Heffernan's service in the Senate that he has been criticized by colleagues and constituents. For instance, when the Senate was set to vote on a proposed equal rights amendment to the Vermont Constitution this past March, Heffernan left the chamber and did not vote. The proposal passed unanimously by every other senator, 29-0. Asked later about the untimely absence, Heffernan blamed an upset tummy.

Then, in May, Heffernan drew fire when on the Senate floor discussing an animal cruelty law he asked his colleagues, what if "I have a gender identity that I identify as a dog..." His reference to transgender people in the context of bestiality was called "dehumanizing" among other things.

In a Legislative Report in the *Independent*, Heffernan said he was just making sure that everyone knew that changes in the law could have unintended consequences. "As your senator, I will continue to vote my conscience and explain my positions openly," he wrote.

Heffernan is up for re-election this year and will face Andrew Klein of New Haven and Andrea Treadway of Orwell in an Aug. 11 Republican state senate primary. The top two vote-getters will go on to face incumbent Sen. Hardy and Democrat Hannah Sessions of Leicester for the two seats representing the Addison District in the Vermont senate.

Asked what he'd look to accomplish if re-elected, Heffernan pointed to the "Vermont Promise" unveiled by Vermont Senate Republicans at the Statehouse on July 29. The "Vermont Promise" outlines priorities in several areas — such as affordable housing and tax relief — that Heffernan said Republicans would work toward whether or not they secure a majority in one or both of the legislative chambers.

"That will be a big staple of what I'll press for if re-elected," he said.

News editor John McCright contributed to this story.

"I think the biggest thing any legislator learns the first couple years there is where the real, for lack of a better word, power is that makes decisions."

—Steve Heffernan



MICHAEL ELMORE

Addison County

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- Graduated from the FBI National Academy — 10-Week training at FBI Academy focused on leadership development
- Grown the department through experience and training so we can offer better services to the County

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If you see my name...

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Michael Elmore

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Michael Elmore

DEM Addison-3

On the Democratic Primary Election ballot in Addison County you will see the following candidates in a competitive race for Addison -3. The top vote getter advances to the General Election.



ARIEL BOLLES



Bolles seeks Democrats' nod for Addison-3 House seat

By JOHN FLOWERS
FERRISBURGH — Like millions of other Americans, Ariel Bolles has felt the emotional and/or financial weight of a seemingly endless barrage of worrisome headlines about the U.S. war with Iran, the conduct of ICE agents in Minnesota, reductions in Affordable Care Act subsidies, and the dearth of affordable housing.
“At the local level, I see a lot of my friends and family and neighbors struggling in ways I haven’t seen before,” she said. “Our dollars haven’t been going as far as they used to. You can feel kind of helpless in the face of many of those issues.”
Bolles has had enough of feeling helpless. Fueled by a desire to foster ground-up change, the Ferrisburgh Democrat has decided to run for one of

the two seats representing the Addison-3 district in the Vermont House.
“I had a few friends nudge me to run,” Bolles said. “I realized it would be an amazing opportunity. (Serving in the House) is something I’m interested in doing and it would be an honor to represent my neighbors in that way.”
Bolles, who specializes in design strategy and service design for government products and websites, joined in the list of Addison-3 candidates that includes fellow Democrats Mike Kane of Ferrisburgh and John Stroup of Vergennes. Voters in Tuesday’s Democratic Primary will decide which two will square off in the the general

election against Ferrisburgh Republicans Rep. Rob North and Joe Baker.
Addison-3 encompasses the communities of Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, Vergennes, Waltham and part of New Haven.
Bolles originally moved to Vermont from Maine when she was 5. She grew up in Charlotte, “a town we never could have afforded to live in if it weren’t for the fact that my dad was the minister at the Congregational church, which meant that we got to live in the parsonage for free,” she said.
Her father also worked as a school bus driver, newspaper deliveryman and columnist, while her mom taught piano lessons and early childhood music.
(See Bolles, Page 7)

“Everyone deserves safe, stable, affordable housing and they should not have to move out of state to get it.”
— Ariel Bolles

Newcomer Mike Kane wants to represent northwest Addison County in Vt. House

By SOPHIA KESHMIRI
VERGENNES — After incumbent Addison-3 Rep. Matt Birong, announced in he won’t seek reelection to represent northwest Addison County in the Legislature, local school board member Mike Kane emerged as a Democratic candidate who could replace him next January.
“I have been a school board member for Addison Northwest School District for about four years, going back to 2022, and just seeing the bills that have come out of Montpelier lately, especially Act 73, has been really disappointing,” the Vergennes resident

said when asked what made him want to run.
“I think we need people in there who have a better understanding of our schools and our communities in order to really deliver the results that our folks want.”
Both Addison-3 seats — which cover Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, Vergennes, Waltham and part of New Haven — are up for grabs in the November general election. Kane, who recently founded nonprofit American Civics Snapshots, was the first Democrat to announce a bid.
Unlike Birong, who was first elected in 2019 and said he opted against a reelection bid to plan the next phase of his professional and

public service life, incumbent Rob North, R-Ferrisburgh, is trying to recoup his seat. North amassed the most votes of any candidate for an Addison-3 seat in 2024.
Kane will be joined in a Democratic primary on Aug. 11 by Ariel Bolles of Ferrisburgh and John Stroup of Vergennes. The top two will advances to the Nov. 3 general election versus North and fellow Republican Joe Baker of Ferrisburgh.
KANE’S FOUR PRIORITIES
Though education is top of mind for Kane, unsurprising given he was once a social studies teacher and currently holds a post on the ANWSD school board, it’s broader issues driving him to Montpelier.
“In general, the lack of action around affordability, the lack of action out of Montpelier to create any meaningful changes for our families, not only in our



MIKE KANE

(See Kane, Page 11)

“I think we need people in there who have a better understanding of our schools and our communities in order to really deliver the results that our folks want.”
— Mike Kane



JOHN STROUP



Former ANWSD school board chair enters House race

By JOHN FLOWERS
VERGENNES — John Stroup spent nine years serving northern Addison County as a member of the Addison Northwest School District board.
Now the Vergennes Democrat is hoping to represent those same constituents in the Vermont House, as one of two representatives of the Addison-3 district.
Stroup, a professor of education at Champlain College, joins Democrat Ariel Bolles of Ferrisburgh and Mike Kane of Vergennes in the race for the two seat that represent Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, Vergennes, Waltham and part of New Haven. They face off in a primary on Tuesday.
Incumbent Rep. Rob North and fellow Ferrisburgh Republican Joe Baker will make it to the General Election ballot in November.

Stroup’s main reason for running: to give back to a community that he, his wife Sarah, and their two now-teenage children joined 15 years ago.
“I love this community and it’s been really good for my family,” he said. “I like public service. I find myself energized by it.”
He found no shortage of energizing issues during his time on the ANWSD board, including five as its chair. ANWSD, like most other Vermont school districts, has seen a steady enrollment decline even as education costs continue to rise. This has led to frustrated taxpayers and painful decisions for school leaders. For example, ANWSD in 2020 began

sending its youngest Addison students to Vergennes Union Elementary School; the former Addison Central School now hosts a childcare program.
Stroup chaired the ANWSD board during that transition. He’s also helped navigate the district through a couple budget defeats.
“I think I did a good job as a leader of the ANWSD board. I believe my community saw me as someone they could trust, who was honest and fair,” he said.
But it’s not only his past school board experience that Stroup cites as a potential legislative asset; he continues to stay in tune with statewide
(See Stroup, Page 11)

“We need help to address skyrocketing healthcare costs and badly needed school maintenance and construction. Cost reduction won’t be enough.”
— John Stroup

Bolles

(Continued from Page 6)

Upon graduation from high school, Bolles spent a few years in Burlington before attending Columbia College in Chicago and then spending 17 years in Illinois — mostly working in IT design. She and her husband, Spencer, moved back to Vermont almost five years ago. They have two young children.

Bolles is able to do her job from home, which has helped her remain active with her family and allowed her to become more invested in her community. She serves on the Ferrisburgh Town Center Committee and previously volunteered on the Addison Northwest School District Comprehensive Equity Assessment Committee.

She's also proud to have founded the Soup and Bread Community Dinners offered at the Vergennes Congregational Church, which are open to anyone interested in homemade soups and neighborly conversation.

Bolles is emphasizing four issues during her campaign, all of them intertwined under an "affordability" banner: housing, health care, education and tax reform.

"I really wanted to focus on things that affect people materially," she said. "These are the big topics I hear about when I talk to neighbors and what I see in the newspaper and Front Porch Forum. They seem to be top-of-mind issues for everybody — and they're so interconnected."

HOUSING

She called the housing shortage an "immediate issue" that's of prime concern for many working families in Addison-3 and beyond. She noted the median home price in Addison County has reached \$531,500 (up 33% over three years), while the median rent has soared to \$2,187 per month (citing realtor.com). "Everyone deserves safe, stable, affordable housing and they should not have to move out of state to get it," she said.

So what does Bolles propose to do about it? She would support an increase in taxes on non-owner-occupied, second home, vacation rental and investment property by supporting the Prosper Act's new property tax classification for non-homestead residential properties. She's also a fan of limiting the purchase of single-family and two-family homes by institutional investors.

Building more housing must also be part of the solution, according to Bolles. That housing should be "affordable and climate-resilient," which she said could be facilitated by creation of a statewide land bank to acquire vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties and return them to productive use as permanently affordable homes. This is a tool currently being developed by a working group of the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development, she noted.

HEALTH CARE

Bolles called health care a "public good," and she wants to move Vermont closer to universal coverage by "making our local systems work better for Addison County and Vermont." She supports the work of groups such as the 802 Vermont Universal Healthcare Coalition in identifying innovative solutions for tackling these health care challenges.

"I also recognize that our school districts' budgets are healthcare budgets, because the largest driver of property tax increases is often the rising cost of employee health insurance premiums," she said.

If elected, Bolles said she'd work to appropriate funding for community health care centers and free clinics to expand primary care, mental health and home health services. "By shifting appropriate care out of expensive hospital systems and into community health centers and school-based clinics, we can lower overall costs and stabilize the insurance premiums that start in our municipalities and education budgets," Bolles said.

Bolles's perspectives on education are in part informed by her work on the ANWSD Equity Committee. "I saw that our schools are the heart of our rural towns and there's so much opportunity to make local schools into thriving community hubs. We can stabilize school budgets, protect taxpayers and fairly compensate our educators, but only if we stop pretending that endless consolidation is the answer," she said.

Bolles pledged to "include local education experts and community members in decision-making about local schools and school districts," while "pursuing thoughtful approaches to efficiency" — including shared services and cooperative agreements between districts.

"I support expanding Career and Technical Education offerings in response to student demand and ensuring equitable access," she said.

RISING TAXES

Bolles acknowledged the financial stress working families are feeling, and their inability to absorb higher taxes. She believes part of the answer lies in asking the highest earners to pay more.

"Put simply: if you have more, you need to do more," she said. "We live in a time of unprecedented wealth and income inequality, and we need to do what we can to level the playing field."

To that end, Bolles supports bills that would create a 2% income tax surcharge on individual income over \$250,000, an additional 6% on income over \$500,000, and a 4% wealth transfer tax on investment income for high-earners.

"These measures would generate \$75 million annually, revenue we could invest in ... Addison County," she said.

"Put simply: if you have more, you need to do more. We live in a time of unprecedented wealth and income inequality, and we need to do what we can to level the playing field."

— Ariel Bolles

Get to know the Primary COUNTY CANDIDATES

The following candidates are running for the Vermont House of Representatives or Vermont Senate. Their names will appear on the Primary ballot for the parties indicated. The incumbent is indicated by (inc). A contested race features a *.

DEMOCRATIC BALLOT

State Senator Add
Hannah Sessions of Leicester
Ruth Hardy (inc) of Middlebury

State Rep. Add 1
Mike Roy of Middlebury
Robin Scheu (inc) of Middlebury

State Rep. Add 2
Tanya Byker of Cornwall

State Rep. Add 3*
Ariel Bolles of Ferrisburgh
Michael L. Kane of Vergennes
John Stroup of Vergennes

State Rep. Add 4
Jeanne Albert of Lincoln
Karen Lueders (inc) of Lincoln

State Rep. Add 5
Jubilee McGill (inc) of Bridport

State Rep. Addison Rutland
Jonathan Hescocock of Shoreham

State's Attorney Add.
Peter Bever of Middlebury

High Bailiff
Dave Silberman (inc) of Middlebury

Probate Judge Add
Pam Marsh (inc) of New Haven

Assistant Judge Add
Patricia "Patty" Ross (inc) of Cornwall
Nicole B. Wilkerson (inc) of Bristol

REPUBLICAN BALLOT

State Senator Add *
Steven Heffernan (inc) of Bristol
Andrew Klein of New Haven
Andrea Treadway of Orwell

State Rep. Add 2
Annie Wilson of Cornwall

State Rep. Add 3
Joseph "Joe" Baker of Ferrisburgh
Rob North (inc) of Ferrisburgh

State Rep. Add 4
Chanin Hill of Bristol
Lynne Dike of Bristol

State Rep. Add 5
Del Thompson of Bridport

State Rep. Addison Rutland
Jim Casey (inc) of Hubbardton

High Bailiff Add
Steve Willson of Cornwall



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DEM Governor



On the Democratic Primary Election ballot in Addison County you will see the following candidates in a competitive race for governor. The top vote getter advances to the General Election.

Democratic governor candidates: Richards says experience, Janoo says big ideas

By SHAUN ROBINSON
VTDigger.org

The two Democrats vying to take on Vermont's Republican Gov. Phil Scott this year have never run for office before. But they've also raked in far more money at this stage in the race than either of the Democrats who challenged Scott in 2024 and 2022.

Ask Amanda Janoo and Aly Richards why that might be the case, and they point to the same trend: Across the country, voters' support for incumbents has been slipping. Data shows an above-average number of incumbent members of Congress have lost their seats across the roughly 30 states that have held primary elections for 2026 so far.

They also point out that Scott, who is seeking what would be his sixth term, scored his lowest job approval rating on record among likely voters in a University of New Hampshire poll in late July. It's a ripe moment for Democrats to back a challenger, they've told voters, pointing to the recent success of first-time Democratic candidates in primaries in New York City and Denver.

"You know, thank you for your service," Richards said in an interview, addressing the governor. "We don't have term limits in Vermont. But we have common sense."

Not since 2020 had a Scott challenger raised more than \$40,000 at this stage in the race. But this year, Richards and Janoo hauled in \$366,000 and \$245,000, respectively, according to the latest filings with the Vermont Secretary of State's Office.

So far, that money does not appear to have bought them significant name recognition among likely voters in their party. Another UNH poll released July 21 found that a majority of Vermont's Democratic primary voters did not know enough about the candidates to say which they would rather vote for.

Meanwhile, the same poll found, Scott would beat either of them, by at least 10 percentage points, if the general election was held today. And to be sure, while the governor's approval rating slipped even further in that latest survey, nearly half of Democratic voters still like the way he is doing his job, the poll found.

Richards and Janoo agree that unseating Scott will take a monumental effort. And as they make their pitches to voters with just weeks before the primary, one narrative has become clear. Richards argues she's the only one with the experience to hit the ground running; Janoo says only she is truly thinking big.

"What if the system itself is part of the problem?" Janoo asked in an interview.

An economist who was born in Strafford and now lives in Burlington, Janoo, who's 38, was the first Democrat to announce a



AMANDA JANOO

bid for governor this year. She's spent much of her career working with think tanks and international development organizations, both in the U.S. and abroad. More locally, she co-founded an organization called Wellbeing Economy Alliance of Vermont that, among other projects, hosts events and workshops focused on economic development.

She also served on the board of Fund Vermont's Future, an organization supporting recent legislative proposals to raise taxes on the state's highest income earners.

That's in some contrast to Richards, who entered the race with more name recognition within political circles from the decade she spent working as the CEO of Let's Grow Kids, long one of the state's most prominent lobbying groups. The organization counts as its biggest success the passage of a 2023 law creating a new 0.44% payroll tax and directing the revenue, along with annual earmarked state funds, to income-based subsidies for families in need of childcare.

The law passed, notably, because a supermajority of Democrats in the Legislature overrode Scott's veto of it.

Before taking the helm of the childcare juggernaut, Richards worked on former President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign and then in the office of former Vermont Democratic Gov. Peter Shumlin, finishing her tenure there in 2015 as deputy chief of staff. Richards, who is 40, hails from Newbury and now calls Montpelier home.

'DO MORE THAN TINKER'

On the campaign trail, Janoo has made the case that Vermont needs "a much more ambitious economic policy agenda." Part of that, she says, is taking drastic steps to reduce Vermont's reliance on a federal government that is "aligned around an



ALY RICHARDS

authoritarian, nationalist vision for our country."

Janoo said the state needs to look inward, rather than out, to grow its economy. That includes finding new strategies to keep more wealth in small communities and out of the hands of large corporations, she said, pointing to laws some states have enacted that tax the revenue large technology companies earn from targeted online ads.

"We need to have a populist approach to economic policy that is not based in a militarization, AI, crypto, libertarian, kind-of-feudal vision for the future of society — and is really centered in coming back to some of the basics," Janoo said.

Part of that approach means reducing the share of Vermont's state budget — currently, about a third — that comes from the federal government, she said.

She pointed to the uncertainty injected into the state's healthcare system by recent federal changes to Medicaid policy, saying it shows that Vermont needs to raise more money on its own to pay for healthcare. Her campaign is pitching using an income tax surcharge on personal income over \$500,000 to pay for free primary care for every person in the state.

Asked how she'd differentiate herself from Richards, Janoo said she has been "more critical of the conventional wisdom and establishment, broadly," than her opponent. That includes both Republicans like Gov. Scott but also Democrats, Janoo said, both of whom she thinks share responsibility for an entrenched wealth inequality that makes life in Vermont and around the country difficult for so many households.

She also echoed that sentiment at a recent candidate forum in South

Burlington.

"This is a moment where we have to do more than tinker with the systems that created these problems in the first place," Janoo said, contrasting herself with Richards.

The UNH poll in July found that among Democrats who were familiar with both candidates, those who identified as socialists or progressives had a slight preference for Janoo while those who called themselves liberals or moderates leaned toward Richards.

'KNOW HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS'

In an interview, Richards pushed back on the idea it was easy to draw such political distinctions between herself and Janoo. She said her leadership of the childcare campaign shows she has already fixed "a broken system," as opposed to only talking about doing so. And, it put in place a policy that is now considered "a sacred plank of the progressive agenda," she added.

"Nobody thought we could fix it and no one had fixed it yet. We didn't take that for an answer. We built a movement," Richards said. "It's not everything, but it is working — and it is bringing real financial relief."

The law has led to a significant increase in the number of families using those state subsidies, according to a report published in January. Experts told lawmakers at the same time that Vermont saw 100 new childcare programs open in the last three years, and 1,700 new child care slots had become available. At the same time, some regions of the state, particularly Franklin and Essex counties, still have an outstanding need for more child care.

Richards says her top policy priority would be to develop an "economic action plan" for the state, the leading goals of which would be to build more housing and expand access to healthcare. When it comes to federal funding for healthcare — as well as other state services — she wants to "fight, fight, fight for every dollar that is owed to us," she said at the South Burlington forum.

Richards is not opposed to raising taxes on high earners to pay for new initiatives, she said in an interview, but has not made it a tenet of her campaign the way Janoo has.

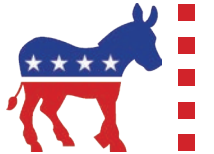
She's also proposed creating a new cabinet-level division of her administration called the "office of rural prosperity." It would work across existing state agencies to make sure rural Vermonters' voices make their way into state government, she said, pointing to the contentious legislative debate over land-use measures in Act 181 as an example of (See Governor, Page 13)

"You have to know how the system works so you can transform it. So you can change it. So you can bust against the status quo."

—Aly Richards

On the Democratic Primary Election ballot in Vermont you will see three candidates in a competitive race for lieutenant governor. The top vote getter advances to the General Election.

DEM Lt. Governor



VT Digger photos/Glenn Russell

Charlestin aims to solve problems by uniting community

By ELOISE CHRISTY

Esther Charlestin says the next lieutenant governor should spend less time proposing new ideas and more time bringing the community and Vermonters together to solve problems.

Charlestin, a former Middlebury selectboard member who now resides in South Burlington, is one of three candidates seeking the Democratic Party's nomination for lieutenant governor. She faces former Lt. Gov. Molly Gray, who served from 2021 to 2023, and Ryan McLaren, a former top aide for U.S. Sen. Peter Welch. Vermont's primary election is Aug. 11, with the Democratic nominee advancing to face incumbent Lt. Gov. John Rodgers in the Nov. 3 general election.

Charlestin has had an extensive career serving Vermont communities through her work on the Middlebury selectboard, the Vermont Commission on Women, her consulting firm Conversation Compass, as the 2024 Democratic nominee for governor, and as a mother living in the Green Mountain State.

"It takes time to build that trust. I'll keep coming back and making sure that they know they have an advocate."

—Esther Charlestin

Her campaign is centered around helping Vermonters navigate education, everyday costs, and gaining economic freedom while also working to build a trusting relationship between the people and the

state government.

"(My) experiences and being a part of the shift in the community ... really showed me that it's important that we're

at the table and that we are a part of the conversations of what's going on, not only in our town, but also in our state," Charlestin said in a recent interview.

Charlestin isn't new to campaigning. In her 2024 race for governor against Republican incumbent Phil Scott, she received a little over 20% of the vote. Charlestin said she has learned from her experiences and reflected on what the top priority is for her.

"What I've learned through my time, as I think, reflect and listen to what the need is in our state, I hear and see that right now, communities are very weary of local government and government altogether, especially nationally," she said. "Folks are feeling disconnected, disengaged."

She said that the lieutenant governor's greatest influence doesn't come from
(See Charlestin, Page 12)



ESTHER CHARLESTIN



MOLLY GRAY



Gray brings many years of legal background to the table

By ANGELO LYNN

In the race for the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor, one of the skills that distinguishes Molly Gray, 42, is her legal background.

Born in Newbury, Vt., she attended public schools in the area and Bradford's Oxbow High School, graduating from Stratton Mountain School in 2002. She studied at the University of Vermont on an athletic scholarship, competing for the Catamounts in cross-country skiing. She followed up her 2006 BA in international studies from UVM with a Juris Doctor from Vermont Law School in 2014. She went on to earn a Master of Laws in international law in 2016.

That legal background is more important than ever, Gray says, in confronting President Trump's continuing attacks on human rights, voting rights, and defending

the basic tenants of our democracy.

"We know the next two years of the Trump administration will be the most dangerous, we're already seeing it," Gray wrote in a recent email exchange. "We continue to see unlawful detentions by ICE, voting rights under attack, and other basic freedoms."

"I became a lawyer in the wake of 9/11 to help protect fundamental rights when we saw the human rights scandals of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and more. For the last 20 years I've worked as a human rights lawyer and advocate, as a Vermont Assistant Attorney General investigating the Catholic Church for child sexual abuse, as a former

lieutenant governor and more recently as executive director of the Vermont Afghan Alliance.

"At a minimum the office has a megaphone, to help Vermonters understand what is lawful and what is not, and how we can protect our communities from unlawful federal action."

—Molly Gray

"When Trump tried to defund the Alliance, I fought to secure the funds to keep it going. When ICE wrongfully detained an Afghan man, I rallied immigration attorneys and prevented his deportation. When Vermont wrongfully ended SNAP (food assistance) for some Afghans, I worked with the legislature, attorneys and our Congressional delegation to get it reinstated."

"I've seen the inhumanity and cruelty of the Trump Administration up close, and moments where some leaders have opted
(See Gray, Page 14)

McLaren cites legislature's lack of progress as inspiration

By ANGELO LYNN

Ryan McLaren, a 39-year-old resident of Essex Junction, entered the race for lieutenant governor because he said he was "fed up" with the lack of progress in Vermont over the past 10 years and because the state has become too expensive for young families to live in.

"The infrastructure of opportunity that made my life possible has eroded around us," he said in an earlier conversation. "And the systems that made my life possible — the ability for my parents to buy a house, the ability for my parents to send me and my siblings to a public school that they had confidence in, the ability for a kid like

"My opponent in this race is nihilism, the sense that nothing matters, politics is broken, and even if you work hard, you're not going to get ahead. I just don't believe that."

—Ryan McLaren

me to get the health care I needed when I needed it at a cost my parents could afford — all of that, all of those systems are broken. And so I feel this fierce sense of urgency."

That urgency, he said, can be summed up in three areas: housing, health care and hope.

"People are desperate for leadership and they are desperate for change, and that provides an opportunity to lead."

McLaren has worked in political organizing for his 15-year career and served as a top aide to Sen. Peter Welch for the past decade before quitting that job to run for lieutenant governor.

Born in Essex Junction, he attended

public schools in Essex, then was admitted to Wesleyan College on an athletic scholarship in football, where he played defensive linebacker.

McLaren has not previously run for public office, but he makes the case that his decade working in Sen. Welch's office as a top aide — where he managed the Democrat's campaigns, helped develop policy and routinely met with constituents — gave him relevant experience for the job. Before working for Welch, McLaren was a top adviser to the commissioner of Vermont's Department of Motor Vehicles and worked in constituent services for former Democratic Gov. Peter Shumlin. He started his career as a field organizer for the state chapter of the Democratic Party.

Even though he has spent the past 15
(See McLaren, Page 15)



RYAN MCLAREN



Facts matter: Why you should trust voting

Vermont Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas, the top official in charge of election in the Green Mountain State, posted the following six truths about Vermont elections.

Today, we have a vast amount of information at our fingertips. This information overload can make it harder than ever to discern facts from:

“disinformation” – information that is intentionally deceptive and spread with malicious motives, and

1. Election Integrity

If you're hearing the myth...

“There’s widespread voter fraud.”

The Truth: Voter fraud of any kind is incredibly rare. The likelihood of getting caught is practically certain, the penalties are severe, and affecting a single vote is a highly ineffective way to influence an election.

2. Voter Registration and Statewide Voter Checklist Maintenance

If you're hearing the myth...

“Local / State voter checklists aren’t accurate or up to date.”

The Truth: Thanks to detailed local scrutiny, statewide systems, and interstate collaboration, voter checklists are updated more quickly and thoroughly than ever.

“misinformation” – information that is outdated or false, but not necessarily spread with the intent to deceive.

Free, fair, and accessible elections are fundamental to our representative democracy and rely on trust and participation. Mis- and disinformation spreads doubt and confusion in our elections process, which can erode that trust and decrease participation — a grave threat to our nation’s future.

3. Voting by Mail

If you're hearing the myth...

“Mail-in ballots aren’t secure.”

The Truth: Voting by mail, which increases voter turnout, is just as secure as in-person voting.

4. College Student Voting

If you're hearing the myth...

“College students can’t vote in Vermont.”

The Truth: Eligible voters, including college students, can register and vote in the community they consider their principal residence. What college students (or anyone else) can’t do is vote in two different places in the same election or register to vote in two different states.

Before sharing election-related information you find online, consider the source. To learn more, you can head online to tinyurl.com/VtElectionSecurity to check out the Secretary of State’s video about election security here in Vermont.

Below you will find the truth about six common myths you may hear during election season, and many of the hyperlinks included in this story online will take you to Title 17 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated, the “rulebook” for Vermont elections.

5. Vote Counting Machines

If you're hearing the myth...

“Vote counting machines (tabulators) can be hacked.”

The Truth: They can’t. “Air gapped” machines, a paper trail, and post-election audits ensure election security.

6. Certification of Results

If you're hearing the myth...

“Discrepancies between Election Night reports and official certified results are proof of vote-rigging.”

The Truth: Official certified results are the product of a rigorous, well-defined, and transparent certification process. Election night reports are typically incomplete and unverified. Changes between the incomplete and official results are normal and expected.

To get deeper information from the Secretary of State explaining further details explaining the truth debunking these myths, go online to tinyurl.com/VtElectionDetails.



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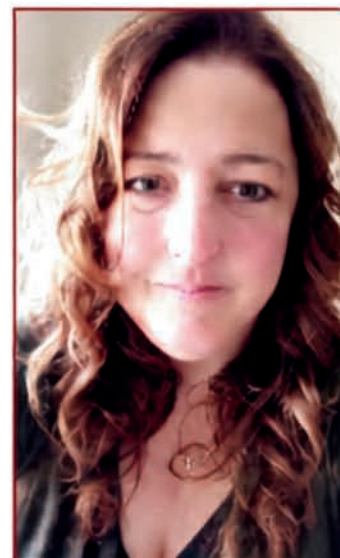
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- Making Vermont livable again for our families. Which means addressing education, property taxes, and healthcare.
- Rebuilding Vermont's economy by supporting small businesses and changing the perception we are not business-friendly.
- Streamlining and reducing land use policies to support agriculture and rural communities to enhance local control for growth.



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Stroup

(Continued from Page 6)
education issues in his professional role at Champlain College.

“I help prepare teachers. What that allows me to do, in addition to working with awesome young people, is I get to go to a lot of schools and talk to a lot of teachers,” he said. “I have a statewide perspective. The issues facing (ANWSD) are similar to what others are facing around the state. So I think I can bring a broader perspective to that.”

The 2027-2028 Legislature might find itself continuing the work on a long-term fix to a Vermont’s public education system. The Legislature passed bill H.955, which eschews forced school consolidations in favor of grouping each of the state’s 119 school districts into one of seven Cooperative Education Service Agencies, or CESAs. Each regional CESA will promote shared resources and services among the member districts to save money.

The new law also establishes study committees within each CESA to sort out a *voluntary* merger process for the member districts.

Stroup believes H.955 “is on the right

track” and wants to see the Legislature and schools tackle specific education cost drivers — like rising health insurance premiums.

He vowed to be wary of any forced consolidation proposals, while carefully assessing the potential impacts of any statewide law on Vergennes-area schools.

“The district I represent is particularly vulnerable to big education reform,” Stroup said.

Stroup believes its clear Vermonters don’t support dividing the state into five public school districts, as Scott had proposed. “Our current situation is not sustainable. We need help to address skyrocketing healthcare costs and badly needed school maintenance and construction. Cost reduction won’t be enough. Conversations about property taxes, efficiency, and, yes, even consolidation will continue,” he stated.

MORE HOUSING

Stroup acknowledged the success of public education reform will in part depend in part on Vermont’s ability to increase its housing stock.

Plenty of young families want to move to Vermont, where there are plenty of

jobs. But there’s not enough workforce housing.

“Vermonters are struggling right now to find a place to live and afford their rent,” he said. “In Montpelier, I will support tax incentives to expand infrastructure, identify underused properties, and promote higher-density development in urban and high-growth opportunity areas. Expanded housing options will support Vermonters and attract more people to our brave little state.”

Vermont, he said, could import housing ideas from other states. He cited, as an example, a successful lease-to-purchase program in Ohio that allows young families to build equity as renters in return for purchase at a later date.

“The housing situation is urgent. We’re going to need to continue to generate ideas,” Stroup said

Health care reform is another pressing need, according to Stroup.

“I’m not an expert on the subject, but I know we have to address it,” he said.

“We’re going to have to bring people together to solve that problem.”

The House Committee on Health Care took testimony this spring on the notion of establishing universal access to primary care in Vermont. Stroup believes the idea has merit.

“My moral compass is about fairness and justice and ensuring we take care of our most vulnerable. I would be glad to take a look at a bill supporting universal primary care,” he said.

In the end, it’s going to take people sharing ideas to solve the state’s problems while designing solutions that reflect multiple viewpoints, according to Stroup. His campaign literature advocates for working together and giving everyone a fair shot at building a future in the Green Mountain State.

Maintaining the status quo and postponing solutions to state problems isn’t an option for Stroup.

“We can’t just say, ‘Change is hard,’” he said.

“My moral compass is about fairness and justice and ensuring we take care of our most vulnerable.”

— John Stroup

Kane

(Continued from Page 6)
schools, but in our communities,” he said. “So that’s been very distressing.”

Kane was a federal employee (working for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) and resigned amid the early days of the upheaval of the federal government in 2025. He said in a press release announcing his candidacy he will prioritize “strengthening public schools through targeted funding and measures to reduce healthcare costs,” “protecting democracy and civil rights, including ensuring fair access to the ballot and defending individual liberties,” “expanding affordability

initiatives for housing, childcare, and healthcare” and “supporting local businesses and family-sustaining jobs.”

He has plans for achieving all four.

When it comes to the first, strengthening education by lowering healthcare costs, he’s interested in how tax and healthcare reform can help.

“I’m highly in favor of taking a look at restructuring the top-most tax brackets in Vermont, so that we can make sure that taxes are more fair and so that we get more funding for the priorities of the state,” Kane said.

When it comes to healthcare, he said collaboration across state lines has grabbed his interest.

“One of the first things that I would like to do is enter into discussions and do some studies in cooperation with the other New England states to see if there are some regional solutions that we can implement

in terms of how we fund healthcare and how we utilize healthcare and how that is distributed.”

Kane also sees a place in the Green Mountain State for direct primary care, which he explained, “is an idea where people would actually subscribe to a primary care physician.”

“So they would pay a monthly fee that would be significantly lower than what they’re paying for insurance, and essentially, they would subscribe to their primary care physician. The primary care physician would take on a number of these subscriptions in order to support themselves and their practices.”

He thinks this would lead more people to seek preventative medical care, instead of giving issues the time to develop into emergencies.

In the last four years, Kane said he has been disappointed in “a lack of legislative action on health care.”

“Which not only would help control our school budgets, because health care is the number one driver of our school budgets, but also help all of our families. If we can come up with better ways to fund health care in the state, then we would solve a lot of the affordability issues,” he said.

“But no one’s been willing to touch that.”

Kane is just one of many with their minds on school.

Education is currently a hot topic in the state as lawmakers in Montpelier try to curb perennially rising costs of educating

young Vermonters through Act 73. The law has become highly contentious for its call to significantly consolidate school districts.

“What we are giving up with Act 73, potentially, is a lot of local control,” he said.

Among his concerns are the voices of people in smaller towns being stymied when it comes to intra-district decisions. How would Kane do it differently?

“One of the things that I’d hopefully like to see changed, at least if we’re going to follow through with Act 73, is that we put in place a system of direct voter approvals for some things,” he said.

“So that way, if a board, if one of these combined large district boards, is going to make some changes, if those changes hit certain areas, like school closures and things like that, we should make sure that we check in with the people and see if that’s something that we really want to do. And I would say, you know, getting a significant majority would need to be required for big changes like that.”

BACKS VOTING

When it comes to protecting democracy and civil rights, Kane said, he’d like to see more guarantees that people have access to the ballot. That includes implementing safeguards to combat the effects of a possible federal election law overhaul, dubbed the Save America Act.

“Vermont is supposed to be in charge of its elections,” Kane said. “And so I think we can put in some safeguards trying to make sure that people have easy access to identification if that Save Act is passed, so that they are able to vote.”

Additionally, especially in the wake of

the recent ICE raid in South Burlington, he’d like to ensure, “that we are properly instructing our law enforcement, and that people’s civil rights are protected in terms of protests, and that those peaceable protesters are not facing undue threat,” he said.

When it comes to expanding affordability, Kane said, “I look at childcare, and I see that the more expansive the systems are, we’re able to create cost savings. You know, it’s the economies of scale, where, if we are able to get kids into adequate childcare, we’re going to have people working better jobs, and we’re going to attract more people to this state.”

He thinks Maple Broadband internet service could help grow the workforce. “I’d like to see them expand significantly over the next few years so that we can attract remote workers, highly paid remote workers, to these new homes that we’re hopefully going to be able to produce,” he said. Growing the tax base would spread out the burden of paying for local schools, he added.

How about local businesses and family-sustaining jobs? Kane said he’d like to make it easier to start businesses in Vermont, like a simpler tax code.

“I think that would be a great way to get some businesses started and hopefully reduce some of that bureaucracy,” he said.



Charleston

(Continued from Page 9)

proposing legislation, but from using the office's "convening power" to bring people together, talk through hard conversations, and overall bridge the gap between the community and state government.

Charleston has been traveling throughout the state to hear directly from Vermonters about the issues they want to see resolved. She has spoken to different communities and counties, hearing one thing loud and clear.

"Healthcare is definitely a huge concern for folks," she said. "I talked with constituents whose bill went up \$26,000. A lot of people in Vermont are living one paycheck away from a disaster and so people are feeling the squeeze of everyday costs."

Not only are current economic pressures and healthcare a core concern for Vermonters, but the housing shortage and education are as well, she said. Hoping for a future of free education for students is something that is on Charleston's mind. When asked about her conversations with Vermonters in the past months, she recalled a conversation she had with a family that loved living in Vermont but couldn't afford to stay.

"That troubles me, because I'm not only thinking about Vermont today, I'm thinking about the Vermont 10, 20 years from now. I see my role...as partnering with different organizations in each county

to really amplify the work they're doing that supports families...And how do we set up our students to honestly not carry the weight, the debt of student loans, giving them the opportunity to build and create stuff?"

One way Charleston plans to aid the housing shortage is to build in downtowns and village centers since the infrastructure to do so already exists.

"My work would be to bring the builders, the towns, the conservation groups, who are usually talking past each other, and build a table where they're talking to each other. Let's talk about those hard things (floods) and some hard decisions we may have to make as a community to make sure people are safe."

This community-centered approach to her work as lieutenant governor comes from her own family and history. Charleston is the daughter of immigrant parents from Haiti. She grew up in a household where they welcomed family and others with open arms. Her mother spent a lot of time building wells in Haiti and so this became the norm. Being part of a community was the norm.

"Watching her implanted something in me," Charleston explained. "I remember when I was seven months pregnant with my daughter, building houses in Tennessee with Habitat for Humanity ... the combination of giving back and then being at the table has been my work."

Charleston moved to Vermont a few years ago and it has now become a place that she cares for deeply. She dreams of a Vermont in which communities come together to solve problems. She recalled the floods that happened in the last few years and how the communities of Vermont came together.

"What if we did that on a regular basis?" she asked. "What if we were able to support each other on a regular basis? As lieutenant governor, I'll have the opportunity to continue to build that infrastructure ... to use this office to continue the work and make sure we have systems in place where folks can communicate with each other, learn from each other, and grow from each other. Make sure that people are at the center."

When it comes to how her campaign compares to the other candidates she is facing in this election, Charleston believes that she is the only one who is not making promises she can't keep. In her opinion, other candidates are bringing in plans that the state simply cannot implement.

"If you're looking for a leader who's community-grounded, who is not afraid to go back into community, to meet people where they are, to bring the community with them to Montpelier so it's not this elite bubble but a place where people have access and their voice is known and encouraged, I am your candidate," She said. "Esther is about the people ... and for the people."

Charleston sees her role to be similar to the one she held when she was dean of climate and culture at Middlebury Union Middle School; a role in which hard-earned respect and care was developed between herself and her students.

"There was a student who I would say hi to enthusiastically every day, and she gave

me the side eye every time," she explained. "By the end of the year, she came back and said thank you...for always saying hi. It meant a lot. That's how I will show up for our communities. It takes time to build that trust. I'll keep coming back and making sure that they know they have an advocate."

Much of Charleston's work as lieutenant governor would be an extension of the work she has been doing for years and using her platform to amplify the voices of Vermonters instead of speaking in place of them. The goal for her is that people's concerns are being advocated for at the state level and that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the two.

"When you're coming in and telling communities what to do, what are you met with?" Charleston asked. "That get-out-of-my-face energy. That you-don't-know-us energy. And that's not how we move policy forward. That is not how we build trust. We build trust by showing up...and asking questions."

Not only has Charleston looked at Vermont from a political standpoint, but she has also experienced it as a resident, a mother, and a community member. She believes that the government should be returning to the people time and time again in order to actually meet their needs.

"I moved here a few years ago," she said. "I remember thinking, this is a beautiful state to raise children. It really is. And I can honestly say years later, I was right. It has been a gift. Vermont has been a gift to me. I've been able to build a family here, build a community here in a way that I've never experienced anywhere else. My intention and hope in all that I do is to serve, to be about the people, and to be the gift to Vermont that Vermont's been to me."

"I talked with constituents whose bill went up \$26,000. A lot of people in Vermont are living one paycheck away from a disaster and so people are feeling the squeeze of everyday costs."
—Esther Charleston

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FAQ

How to vote in Vermont's 2026 primary election

How do I register to vote?

Online - Visit the Vermont Voter Portal at vote.vermont.gov, enter your information, then follow the prompts to use a valid Vermont driver's license/permit/non-driver ID or the last 4 digits of your Social Security number to register.

Paper - Download and print a blank Voter Registration Application, which is can be found at sos.vermont.gov. Fill it out and mail or hand deliver it to your municipal clerk's office.

If you don't have one of those forms of ID, you can still register to vote at your town clerk's office.

Be sure to take the Voter's Oath if you have never voted in Vermont. The Oath can be self-administered and is contained on the online and paper applications.

Visit the Registration page at sos.vermont.gov/elections for more information about registering to vote in Vermont.

Vermont has automatic voter registration through the Department of Motor Vehicles. When you apply for a license or change your address at the DMV, your information will be sent to the Secretary of State's Office for voter registration purposes, unless

(See FAQ, Page 13)



Photo by Glenn Russell/VT Digger

Governor

(Continued from Page 8)

why the office is needed.

To be sure, there are numerous policy areas where both candidates agree. Both have been clear, for example, that they oppose forcing school districts to consolidate, something Scott pushed for this year until later conceding it was not politically popular.

But Richards also made the case in an interview that a governor needs to have prior experience in the Statehouse to be effective. Scott served as lieutenant governor for six years and in the Senate for a decade before winning the state's top job.

"I just don't think you can hit the ground running if you don't really know how the Vermont Legislature works," Richards said. "You have to know how the system works so you can transform it. So you can change it. So you can bust against the status quo."

She suggested Janoo was focused on "tech bros" or a "trillionaire" who may dominate many national political debates, but whose actions create broad societal challenges that cannot realistically be tackled by the governor of a small, rural state.

"A lot of that existential discussion is 100% true. I share that angst," she said. She might be talking about those issues more, she added — "if I was running for president."



Photo by Glenn Russell/VT Digger



FAQ

(Continued from Page 12)

you check the box on the form to decline. You can also request a voter registration application when you apply for economic benefits or social services through the Agency of Human Services.

How do I verify if I am registered to vote in Vermont?

Visit the Vermont Voter Portal at vote.vermont.gov to check your registration status online, or contact your municipal clerk.

What is the deadline to register to vote?

Any eligible person may register to vote up to and including the day of the election.

Registration is available during all normal business hours of your town or city clerk's office on days preceding the election and during polling hours on Election Day.

Once you are registered to vote you do not need to re-register unless you move to a new town.

Am I eligible to vote in Vermont?

Any person may register to vote in the town of his or her residence who, on Election Day:

1. is a citizen of the United States;
2. is a resident of the state of Vermont (and a resident of the town in which you apply to be added to the checklist);
3. has taken, or has previously taken, the Voter's Oath (formerly called the "Freeman's Oath"); and
4. is age 18 or older.

Any person meeting the requirements above who will be 18 on or before the date of a general election may register and vote in the primary election immediately preceding that general election.

For purposes of voter registration, the Vermont Statutes define residency as follows:

"Resident" shall mean a person who is domiciled in the town as evidenced by an intent to maintain a principal dwelling place in the town indefinitely and to return there if temporarily absent, coupled with an act or acts consistent with that intent.



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Gray

(Continued from Page 9)

to coordinate or capitulate rather than hold the line.

“At a minimum the office has a megaphone, to help Vermonters understand what is lawful and what is not, and how we can protect our communities from unlawful federal action.”

Gray pointed out that the state’s Democratic leaders were fighting against Trump’s wrongful actions, but not the top two positions in state government.

“Our Vermont Secretary of State is using her office to protect Vermonters,” she said. “Our Attorney General is using the courts to protect the state. Our Treasurer is raising money to ensure those detained by ICE have access to legal counsel, and our legislature is working to advance legislation. Vermonters deserve a lieutenant governor with the experience and the urgency to support their efforts and to help Vermont hold the line.”

Gray also noted that the lieutenant governor has a Constitutional role that requires extensive knowledge of the rules of legislative procedure and the legislative process.

“Having a legal background is incredibly helpful in the day-to-day work of presiding (over the Senate) and also in advocating for legislation that protects fundamental rights and delivers for our communities. With many new senators and legislators next year, and massive challenges facing our state, I’ll be ready on day one to lead, and to be a thoughtful partner to policymakers.”

The Scott administration’s idea to “go along to get along,” Gray continued, wasn’t good enough, adding that Trump’s decisions to cut aid to blue states — from Medicaid to health care to FEMA funding to ending SNAP benefits — and to deport migrants even if they have legal status, proves that a stronger resistance to those policies is needed.

“The Trump administration doesn’t care about what’s right. They’re willing to come for Afghan allies who fought beside our soldiers. They’re willing to come for all of us... A lot of people say, well, what can the lieutenant governor’s office

actually do? Well, we make a strong case that ending SNAP benefits is harmful, that refugees and immigrants aren’t a drain our system they’re how we’re growing our workforce. The lieutenant governor can make it really clear what is right, what is wrong, what’s lawful, what is not.”

Gray was elected lieutenant governor in 2020 after beating out a crowded field of Democratic primary opponents. She was in the job for less than a year before launching her campaign for what was then an open U.S. House seat. She was defeated in the Democratic primary by Becca Balint, who easily won the general election.

After leaving office in 2023, Gray was tapped to serve as the first executive director of the Vermont Afghan Alliance. The Burlington nonprofit supports Afghans who are resettling in the state.

Gray said she’s motivated to run for lieutenant governor again because of her own experiences — giving birth to her son, Jack, since she has left office, as well as caring for her mother, who lives in Newbury and has multiple sclerosis.

“I’ve experienced firsthand a health care system in crisis. Trying to access health care in rural Vermont is extremely challenging right now,” she said. “We’re deeply concerned, as I think many, many families and many Vermonters are.”

More also needs to be done to confront “the day-to-day realities of life in Vermont,” Gray said.

“We don’t have enough housing. We have a healthcare system that is completely imploding... We need to get back to the basics, to a ‘working family’s agenda’ in which we’re actually investing in primary care and reforming our healthcare system...”

GRAY’S DIFFERENCES

Asked how her policies distinguished her, she cited the following:

• “My plan to provide universal primary care comes with a funding plan. I’ve

“I know I have the skills, both the legal skills to help hold the line, and a really thoughtful understanding of the needs of working families and what real investments could do to change our economic future. And yes, there’s no learning curve. I know the job, and I’m ready to hit the ground running.”

—Molly Gray

proposed that we consider revenue sources like increasing the tax on second homes in Vermont and recouping the Trump tax cuts on the state’s wealthiest residents, and that these funds be directly invested into universal primary care which we know will help bring down insurance premiums (and in turn education costs and property taxes).”

• “Other candidates’ housing policies simply propose more financial incentives, using money that may not even be available in future budgets. Their proposals assume that enough money will simply incentivize municipalities to solve our housing crisis.

“However, Vermonters already know why housing is too expensive and too scarce: a stifling regulatory environment at the state and local levels, inequitable distribution of state-funded planning and infrastructure resources, and a skilled labor force that is simply too small to build at scale. My plan directly attacks these root causes with specific proposals that will cut through red tape and increase state and local coordination, all while investing in a labor force that can not only build the housing we need but will also provide Vermonters with good-paying jobs.”

• “I am a vocal advocate for campaign finance reform and am the only candidate with a plan to get corporate money out of Vermont’s elections (that is, the Corporate Power Reset, modeled on similar initiatives in Hawaii, California and Montana).

• “Protecting fundamental rights is not a slogan for me. It’s an ongoing practice that requires collaboration, mutual support, and being part of a coalition. During this campaign, I’ve helped organize immigration attorneys and advocates during Legislative hearings following the March 11 ICE raid in South Burlington. I’ve helped raise funds to support the

Vermont Asylum Assistance Project. I’ve stood with Vermont’s immigrant community in the wake of recent killings by ICE in Maine and Texas civilians. No matter the results of this election, I will continue to find ways to help protect the fundamental rights of every Vermonter.”

On public education, Gray supported the Legislature’s push to implement voluntary mergers.

“Who wants to close schools in Vermont? No one I know,” said Gray. She also said she would hold off on implementing a foundation plan until at least some of those school mergers were in place. “We do have to address our educational costs,” she said, adding that one of the primary focuses of school costs continues to be health care expenses. “If we don’t address those underlying costs, there’s no amount of consolidation ultimately that’s going to lower costs in the long run.”

‘HIT THE GROUND RUNNING’

Gray has been critical of the Scott administration willingness to accept the status quo and its resistance to advancing new ideas to tackle Vermont’s biggest issues.

“We’ve seen 10 years of managing decline, or 10 years of swatting away different investment strategies,” Gray said. “We need something different... I’m not trying to say it’s easy, but I believe we are in a moment of reckoning and people are willing to come together across party lines to make the investments the state needs.

“And I think Vermonters want a lieutenant governor who is going to fight for them, to hold the line and fight for the investments that are actually going to lower costs. So, I’d be a lieutenant governor working to protect Vermonters’ rights, support working families and work to lower costs with ferocity.”

“I know I have the skills, both the legal skills to help hold the line, and a really thoughtful understanding of the needs of working families and what real investments could do to change our economic future. And yes, there’s no learning curve. I know the job, and I’m ready to hit the ground running.”

How to vote in Vermont’s 2026 primary election

By VTDigger.org

To take part in the primary, you must be registered to vote in Vermont, though you may still register on the day of the election.

Vermont’s primary election is this coming Tuesday, Aug. 11.

There are two ways to vote:

• Early voting by mail or in person, from June 29 to Aug. 10

In person at your polling place on Aug. 11

All U.S. citizens who are residents of Vermont and will be 18 or older for the general election on Nov. 3 are eligible to register to vote in the primary election.

VOTER REGISTRATION

To vote in the primary, you must be registered to

vote in Vermont, though you may still register on the day of the election.

If you’re not registered, there are multiple ways to do so:

• In person at your town clerk’s office in the days leading up to the election.

• In person at your polling place. **You may register at your polling place on the day of the election (Aug. 11).**

• You may also register online or by mail using a paper registration form, both available via the Secretary of State’s Office website (olvr.vermont.gov), but be sure to leave several days for your registration to be processed if you are using these methods.

According to the Secretary of State’s Office, first-

time registrants will be required to submit a photocopy of a valid form of ID. Acceptable documents include:

- Valid photo ID (driver’s license or passport)
- Current utility bill
- Current bank statement
- Another government document

First-time Vermont voters must also take the voter’s oath, a short statement one may recite to oneself.

EARLY VOTING

Early voting is available from June 29 to Aug. 10. There are multiple ways to request and submit your ballot.

• Request your ballot:

—In person at your town clerk’s office

—Online or by mail using a paper registration

McLaren

(Continued from Page 9)

years working within the Democratic Party, he's tough on the party's performance and says Democrats need to be more forthright in addressing the issues of affordability.

"The American dream is out of reach for most people and Democrats need to own it. Trump is making things worse, but he didn't cause all of it," McLaren says. That's true at the state level as well, he said, adding that many Vermonters have "lost their trust in Montpelier."

"Look around. Most people can't afford to buy or build a house. Health care costs have doubled (partly due to Trump's big, beautiful bill slashing President Biden's health care subsidies to many middle-income Vermonters). Politics are more focused on ideologies, not outcomes."

Part of the solution, he said, is that "Democrats have to change. We're good at problem analysis, but not as good at taking action to fix it."

Regarding Vermont's affordable housing crisis, he said Vermonters "need to be willing to say 'yes' to things. We've become too precious. We need to say 'yes' to environmental needs, and that means yes to wind and solar — even when it might be right next to you."

One of the focuses of McLaren's campaign is that he's more focused on getting things done than on politics, and cites much of the work he's done while working with Sen. Welch to make his point, including the following projects in fiscal year 2026:

- Led the effort with UVM to secure a \$23.7 million federal grant to create a UVM Tech Hub program. It is the largest research award in UVM history. The grant pairs GlobalFoundries' semiconductor leadership with UVM's researchers bringing "cutting-edge facilities and computing technology to Vermont." The Tech Hub will train over 500 new employees in the semiconductor workspace and engage over 6,000 K-12 students across Vermont in STEM participation in the next five years.
- Helped secure \$30 million in USDA

Disaster Aid relief for flooding in 2023-2024.

- Secured \$5,250,000 for Ascend Housing Allies Incorporated to help construct a 21-unit, fully affordable, rental apartment building in Middlebury; \$100,000 for the Center for Agricultural Economy for farm-to-school education and local food school nutrition; \$996,000 in federal funding to expand and sustain its Bridges to Health Community Health Worker program across all rural Vermont communities; \$750,000 for VHCBC to expand the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program's capacity to serve working lands businesses, with a focus on beginning farmers and businesses; and \$1 million to expand available childcare slots to meet the needs of the community and add nine new full-time jobs.

Asked what distinguishes his policy proposals, McLaren says "the main difference in this race is leadership and experience — the leadership to develop real policy solutions that can make an impact immediately and the experience and track record to actually get things done."

"The clearest difference is on housing and property taxes. I have proposed a 'Yes in My Back Yard' tax credit that would give communities \$25,000 in property-tax relief for every new unit of housing they permit. Vermont is already spending hundreds of millions to artificially buy down property taxes year after year. My proposal would use those same dollars to make property-tax relief an incentive for communities to build more housing across the state, grow our grand lists, and actually fix the structural deficit in education funding."

"It connects the two things people are desperately asking for: more homes, so they can find a place to live that they can afford, and property-tax relief, so they can stay in the homes they already have."

McLaren also says he was the first "to propose a pied-à-terre tax on luxury second homes. People who own ski

chalets in Stowe should never be paying a lower property-tax rate than the family down the street that just wants to send their kid to the local school. It is happening now, and we could change it tomorrow." A pied-a-terre tax, which is French for "foot on the ground," is applied to luxury homes owned by non-residents that are used as second homes. All three Democratic candidates support the same tax on luxury homes.

All three candidates also support universal primary care. McLaren says it's "a practical first step toward a system where everyone can get the care they need. Vermont already spends too much on health care — we need to reorganize the system by investing in primary care, strengthening rural providers, and helping people get care before they end up in an emergency room. But that

is just one thing Vermont can do. The real solution in the end is a national, Medicare-for-All single-payer system where health care is treated as a right and not a privilege."

On education, McLaren acknowledges the need for school consolidation saying that the current 118 school districts are too many, but the governor's recommended 5 is too few. Determining the right number is one of the challenges facing the state, he said, adding that the key focus should be on student outcomes.

McLaren says he also views the lieutenant governor's office as an "Office of the Public Advocate — an office that connects Vermonters with their government, brings people together around practical solutions, and follows through until problems are solved. I have spent my entire adult life in public service in Vermont, and I know how to bring people together to get things done," he says.

On affordability, McLaren says it's not just one issue. "It's housing, healthcare, childcare, energy, and whether people can imagine building a future in Vermont. My job as lieutenant governor would be

to keep the focus on outcomes instead of politics. We need a culture of yes on the things we say we want, especially housing and renewable energy.

"But it's not good enough to just say we want more homes and clean energy. We need to rebuild systems that get to 'yes' on these things. My YIMBY Tax Credit will be a great start on housing. But we need regulatory and permitting processes for both housing and energy development that are consistent, predictable, and timely so we can get more homes and more energy into the market and lower costs. Wind and solar are the cheapest energy on the planet and they don't have to go through the Strait of Hormuz. If we want more jobs and lower bills, we need to deploy wind and solar rapidly."

McLaren also cites a different opponent in the race: nihilism.

"Real openness and generosity are possible in our politics, as hard as it is to see, and they're especially possible in a place like Vermont," he said in an interview in the *Wesleyan Magazine*. "My opponent in this race is nihilism, the sense that nothing matters, politics is broken, and even if you work hard, you're not going to get ahead. I just don't believe that. My life experience has taught me something else: If you get up every day and you try to do a little bit better, things you never could imagine are possible."

In various interviews, McLaren notes how his life was changed by a skiing accident in 2017 at Mad River Glen that left him with little to no function below the knees and limited function between his waist and knees, a condition known as incomplete paraplegia. His condition has improved since then, he said, though he continues to use a wheelchair to get around.

"We get to choose whether or not we want to pull the cover over our eyes and hope for a miracle, or we want to, you know, get out of bed every day and just get to work and try and make things better," McLaren said. "The only way to fail is to not try — and there's hope in the trying."

Voting how-to

(Continued from Page 14)

form via the Secretary of State's Office website.

- Then, submit your ballot:
 - By mail (too late now for this)
 - Drop it off at your town clerk's office.

Early ballots must be received at your town clerk's office by close of business on Aug. 10. If you're

mailing your ballot, allow a week for delivery.

For the primary, you will be offered a ballot from each of the major parties: Democratic, Republican and Progressive. **You must pick one ballot to complete — do not complete all three.** However, all three ballots — including the two blank ones — must be returned in the envelope provided.

PRIMARY ELECTION DAY

To vote in person on Aug. 11: Find your polling place on the Secretary of State's Office website. Polls open at various times from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. and all of them close at 7 p.m.





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