

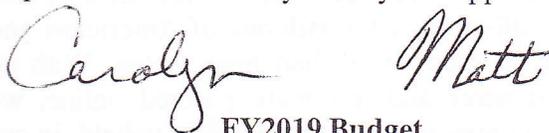
# TOWN MEETING REPORT - 2018

## Reps. Carolyn Partridge and Matt Trieber

Dear Friends,

This report is to let you know some of the issues we are working on during the 2018 session. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Our contact information is on the reverse side of this newsletter.

Carolyn serves as Chair of the Agriculture and Forestry Committee. Matt serves on the Appropriations Committee. If you have any questions, thoughts, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us at the State House toll free – 1-800-322-5616. It is an honor to continue to serve as your State Representatives. Thank you for your support.



### FY2019 Budget

State law requires the Governor to deliver his Budget Address to a Joint Session of the Legislature in January. It is then the responsibility of the House Appropriations Committee to build a budget for the Legislature to consider and ultimately pass. Heads of Vermont Agencies and Departments testified before Appropriations in January and February to relate details and defend the proposals set forth by the Administration. To involve Vermonters in the process, the Appropriations Committee held nine public hearings across the state to provide the opportunity for people to voice opinions on the governor's proposed budget for 2019. More than 200 Vermonters testified before the committee to share their thoughts and concerns regarding proposed investments and reductions.

Highlights of initiatives as proposed by the governor include investments in community outreach for those experiencing addiction and suffering from mental illness, an economic development plan to encourage people to move to Vermont and to build the economy, services to infants and families effected by opioids, expanded dental benefits for children, and benefits for Vermonters serving in the military. Reductions in the governor's proposed budget include eliminating cost sharing benefits to help working Vermonters pay health care premiums, eliminating the attendant care programs serving those with disabilities, reducing

developmental disability services by \$4 million, reducing Agency of Human Services grants by \$4 million, and reducing payments to primary care doctors and hospitals.

The Appropriations Committee is on schedule to pass the House's proposed budget just after Town Meeting week. We are fully committed to working to create a responsible budget that is balanced, focuses on the needs of Vermonters, and keeps the issue of affordability in the forefront of the decision-making process. A monetary analysis for all new programs has been implemented to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the impact of future costs to Vermonters. The House will send the Senate a balanced budget to consider that continues to support and strengthen a strong and healthy future for Vermonters.

### Rural Enterprise Development Initiative

With the changing nature of agriculture in Vermont emphasizing direct consumer engagement and value-added products and experiences, House Agriculture and Forestry has been looking at ways to make it easier for farmers to add additional revenue-generating activities to their enterprises. Currently, inconsistencies in town zoning across the state make it difficult for some farmers to set up farm-related businesses on-site.

To that end, the House passed legislation this month that will make it easier for farmers to add agriculture-related accessory businesses to their operations. H.663 creates a consistent baseline of permitted agricultural enterprise activities across Vermont to help our farms stay viable. The bill gets rid of confusion about what's allowed so farmers can know what on-farm activities are okay for them and their towns.

Two categories of on-farm businesses are authorized under the bill: 1) businesses involving storage, preparation, processing, and/or sale of qualifying products, as long as more than 50% of total annual sales are from qualifying products principally-produced on the farm where the business is located; and 2) educational, recreational or social events that

feature agricultural practices or qualifying products or both. The bill is now before the Senate for further consideration.

### Pollinator Protection

For several years, the House Agriculture and Forestry Committee has been pondering the decline and challenges faced by some of our pollinators, in particular, native bees and honeybees. In 2016 the Legislature passed a bill that created the Pollinator Protection Committee (PPC). Experts from all aspects of the field, including beekeepers, scientists, and farmers were appointed to the PPC, which was tasked with studying and evaluating the state of native pollinators and honeybees in Vermont. The results of the work of the PPC indicated interesting results.

While some want to blame pollinator decline entirely on pesticides called neonicotinoids (neonics), there are actually several other factors that may be important contributors to the problem. One major problem is the loss of forage. Urbanization has resulted in a huge loss of habitat for pollinators. Agricultural practices have changed and hay that used to be harvested twice a year may now be harvested four or five times in a season. This eliminates the opportunity for flowering to occur, also reducing the amount of forage available. Beekeepers have noticed an increased cultivation of corn, which is self-pollinating, but this, too, has reduced the forage area.

An additional factor is the influx in the 1980s of mites, in particular, tracheal and varroa mites. The tracheal mites have been somewhat contained but varroa mites infect honeybees and other pollinators with viruses that weaken and kill them, and they have been hard to beat.

Pesticides such as neonicotinoids have also taken their toll. Neonics were introduced to replace a class of pesticides known as organophosphates that were significantly more toxic to mammals. Neonics are safe enough for mammals that they are used on cat and dog flea collars. They are, however, extremely toxic to insects and if a bee lands on a rose bush that has been recently sprayed with neonics, it will die.

Perhaps, one of the most common uses of neonics in agriculture is in seed coatings. The vast majority of corn and soybeans planted in Vermont are coated prophylactically, whether it's needed or not. While coatings have gotten much better in terms of generating lethal dust as the seed is planted, it still creates a problem because the neonics are absorbed

and become part of the system of the plant. At the same time, some is released into the soil. As mentioned above, corn is self-pollinating and bees are not particularly interested in it, but the fact that it is going into the soil and running off into the waters of the state is a problem. It is having a negative effect on other insects such as benthic macroinvertebrates – dragonflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies. When we disrupt the web of life, we are, potentially asking for trouble.

It's critically important for homeowners to be aware of what pesticides they are using; follow carefully the directions on the package; understand the effects they might have on pollinators and insects, in general; and think about alternatives they could use instead.

### Regulation of Data Brokers and Consumer Protection

Many Vermonters were concerned last year when one of the biggest credit reporting agencies admitted that their servers had been breached and the personal and financial information for millions of Americans and thousands of Vermonters had been stolen. With so much commerce and information stored online, we think the promise to protect it should be upheld. In our "Data Brokers" bill, we are requiring those companies that sell this information to follow the same protocol that "data collectors" are required to do. We are requiring them to register with the Secretary of State, provide their opt-out provisions, and rescind the fees currently charged to place and lift security freezes when a person's information has been compromised. This is a pure consumer protection bill, and will provide security for Vermonters in a way they deserve.

*Clip and save for future reference*

If you have questions or concerns, or if you would like more information, please contact us:

**Rep. Carolyn Partridge**

1612 Old Cheney Rd.

Windham, VT, 05359

Home: 802-874-4182

[cpartridge@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:cpartridge@leg.state.vt.us)

[www.carolynpartridge.com](http://www.carolynpartridge.com)

**Rep. Matt Trieber**

82 Atkinson St.

Bellows Falls, VT, 05101

Home: 802-376-1134

[matrieber@gmail.com](mailto:matrieber@gmail.com)

*Paid for by Reps. Partridge and Trieber*