



Opinions

Office of the Vermont Secretary of State

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May 2009



Community Business Connections

See page 11.

Quote of the Month

I'm tired of hearing it said that democracy doesn't work. Of course it doesn't work. We are supposed to work it.

~Alexander Woollcott

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A Message from the Secretary

By now everyone in Vermont knows someone who has been directly affected by the economic downturn. Maybe a relative has lost a job, a friend cannot sell a house, or a local business is thinking about closing its doors. During times like these, we need to come together as a state. Whether we are running state government, working in local office, or involved as neighbors and friends, getting Vermont's economy moving again must be an important priority. That is why I am asking that you partner with the Secretary of State's Office on an important new project designed to create new jobs by helping Vermonters start and expand businesses.



Community Business Connections is a joint project of the Secretary of State's Office, the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Vermont Small Business Development Centers (VtSBDC). The goal of this project is to engage local officials, individual entrepreneurs, local chambers of commerce, and civic and social clubs like Rotary and Kiwanis to reach out to Vermonters to let them know what resources are available to help them start and expand businesses in their communities.

To make it easy we have created some new resources. First, the *Community Business Connections'* website (www.startabusinessinvermont.net) contains a checklist that provides step-by-step information on starting or expanding a business. The checklist includes links to help entrepreneurs develop a business plan, obtain financing, navigate tax requirements and regulations, find customers, and expand sales. Stickers advertising the new website are available for placement on or near public access computers in libraries and other public buildings. We also created a poster (we have enclosed one in this issue of *Opinions*) for community bulletin boards directing Vermonters to the new website and the free resources available through the Small Business Administration and the Vermont Small Business Development Centers.

As part of the *Community Business Connections* program we are offering training to local officials, librarians, and individuals through the Town Officer Educational Conferences, the Vermont State Library training programs and through webinars to provide more in-depth information about the resources available to Vermonters who are thinking about starting or expanding a business.

In each of our communities there are people who are losing their jobs and need to figure out what they're going to do next. Starting a business may not be right for everyone, but if we all took a moment to reach out, I bet we would be surprised by the number of people in our communities who are ready to take the plunge. Find out more about how you can get involved in the *Community Business Connections* project by contacting us at 802-828-2148.

Deborah L. Markowitz, Secretary of State

Voice from the Vault

Gregory Sanford, State Archivist

Socialized Medicine: The View from 1944

What exactly is socialized medicine? This question received quite a bit of attention in the discussions of the Rural Policy Commission in 1944 as it planned for a post-war Vermont. Much of this discussion is captured in the July 1944 publication: "Rural Health After the War, A Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Vermont Rural Policy Committee."

The report began by noting that 30 percent of Vermont's draftees were rejected for military service "because of poor health." The committee noted that while the health of Vermonters had improved in some areas, "there are still plenty of health problems, particularly in relation to health education, health regulations, the prevention of illness, and medical care. These are things we can do something about."

At a two-day meeting of the commission, six county rural policy committees reported on their discussions. The Bennington committee explored preventive health programs such as "well-baby clinics" and noted the problem of including small towns in health plans. Caledonia's committee "discussed the health and rehabilitation problems of disabled veterans," adding that "in some cases, after signing waivers in connection with their discharge, veterans have developed service-connected ailments (as malaria and mental ailments)." Franklin County also mentioned the mental health problems of veterans, though linked it to "the inability of many draftees to adjust themselves to army routines," rather than

combat-related stress. Franklin also highlighted dental problems stemming from the lack of available care and poor diets. Washington County promoted better health education programs, while Windsor County wanted a "hospitalization plan for everyone."

Chittenden County covered a variety of topics including "socialized medicine, hospital insurance, and 'health care for all.'" The committee "members who spoke in favor of these things seemed to look forward to some means by which everyone might have the services of a physician when necessary whether or not he is financially able to pay for them."

The meeting notes added that "no one present could adequately describe just what socialized medicine means."

Dean Carrigan of UVM's Agricultural College took a crack at explaining socialized medicine. He defined it "as the providing of medical services by government, with government retaining control of the facilities. Vermont people are more interested in cooperative medicine than in socialized medicine, he believed."

Another definition was offered to the effect that "any plan is socialized that is financed by taxation...If a town voted money to get a doctor, the practice of medicine is socialized to the extent of the money put in..." An analogy to education was offered: "There is a socialized form of education (the public schools, toward the maintenance of which everyone has to contribute)."



Beyond discussions of socialized medicine, the study of post-war health care in Vermont is fascinating. Everyone agreed that the lack of doctors, particularly in rural areas was a problem. In 1944 there were 390 physicians in Vermont, 257 of which were considered active (below the age of 65). Of these there were 95 in Chittenden County, creating a ratio of one doctor for every 725 county residents. In contrast Essex County had two physicians, for a 1 to 2,695 ratio. That disparity was one reason the idea of a public health nurse in each town was generally supported. The committee also feared that doctors returning from military service would prefer to practice in the larger communities, not in rural areas.

The state committee's overall recommendations are interesting in light of our ongoing discussions of health care. Clearly the committee grappled with, to use their terminology, finding a balance between cooperative and socialized medicine. The committee recognized that a third of Vermonters could not afford regular health care. It expressed its belief that "it is an important part of our program to educate the people to accept the principle that society should assume a part of the financial responsibility for the physical and mental well-being of its citizenry, and to cooperate with a health program, and further consider the public nature of the program, not on a basis of charity (either by those who receive the benefits and/or those who contribute), but to accept these as we do our educational system, namely, any money used on health is not an expense, but a good investment." Perhaps illustrating the tension between the supporters of cooperative and socialized medicine, the committee went on to say that it "feels that a tax-supported bill points to universal socialized medicine unless the services under the bill are limited to those who are unable to pay for such services, either through cooperative associations or private means."

This short space cannot do justice to either the scope of the post-war rural policy committee activities or even to just its health care

discussions. Within the same folder, for example, is "Nutrition Report For Vermont Post-War Planning," which focuses on the need for good nutrition and nutrition education in order to reduce health care costs. It found that "nine percent of the 473 infants and preschool children examined had nutritional defects" while five percent of the 2,892 school children examined also had nutritional defects. It attributed Vermont's poor diets to "traditional food habits," "lack of knowledge of adequate nutrition," and "inadequate income." In another foreshadowing of current discussions the report recommended school lunch programs, which where in place had shown "a marked improvement in the physical condition of the children."

For anyone interested in learning more, the reports can be found in record series PRA-063, Box PRA-00301. Seeing you in our Middlesex reference room would be just what the doctor ordered.

NOTE: If you are interested in other health care studies, the 1932 study on medical costs is available in our "spotlight on records" section at: <http://vermont-archives.org/research/spotlight/records.htm>



Opinions of *Opinions*

Secretary of State Deb Markowitz

1. Clerk must record deed that is presented to it with proper payment. A town clerk must record properly submitted deed and survey (conforms to statutory requirements in 27 V.S.A. §341) even if an abutter objects that it contains incorrect information. The recording function is a ministerial duty that allows the documents to provide notice to others. If a correction needs to be made, a new corrected deed or survey must be submitted for recording.

2. Justice of the peace vacancies are filled by the governor. If a justice of the peace resigns, moves out of state, or dies, a vacancy is created. 17 V.S.A. §2623. The law provides that the governor may appoint a qualified person to fill the vacancy. The statute allows the town committee of the political party of the person whose death or resignation created the vacancy to meet (with 5 days notice) to make a recommendation or recommendations to the governor. The governor is not bound by any recommendation. The law does not include a specific process for recommendation if the vacancy was created by a justice who was an independent. After the governor has made an appointment, the town clerk notifies the elections division so that our list of BCA members can be updated.

3. Town may charge actual and reasonable attorneys fees related to delinquent tax collection. When a town sends delinquent taxes to an attorney for collection and to begin the tax sale process, if the delinquent taxpayer decides to pay all of the back taxes, penalty, and interest, the town can also add the actual and reasonable attorney fees that it has incurred. 32 V.S.A. §5258. The law does not allow the town to charge the delinquent taxpayer a fee based on a straight percentage of the taxes owed. It may only charge the taxpayer for the actual attorney fee it has incurred.

4. A person in a correctional institution must register to vote where he or she last resided prior to incarceration. Vermont law provides that “a person can neither gain nor lose residency...while in a correctional institution.” 17 V.S.A. §2121 and 2122(a). There is also a more specific provision in 28 V.S.A. §807 that states that a person cannot register to vote in the town where the correctional facility is located. While some attorneys consider this provision to be unconstitutional, it has not been challenged in court.



5. The legislative body (selectboard or school board) must pass a resolution of public necessity to begin the process for a bond vote. 24 V.S.A. §1755. All bond votes require special and additional notice and warning to be provided as directed in 24 V.S.A. §1756. . The ballots must be prepared as directed in 24 V.S.A. §1758. The boards and town clerk must provide copies documenting the various steps to bond counsel. Ask your bond counsel to provide you with a checklist so that you can be certain that you do not omit any required publications and that you properly document all steps. It is wise to confirm that you have prepared for all the required postings and newspaper publications with bond counsel before the posting and warning period begins.

6. Public records must be available during reasonable office hours. The public records law in 1 V.S.A. §315-318 provides that custodians of public documents must make documents available to the public for inspection and copying during reasonable hours. The law does not require that the custodian fax copies of documents to anyone, or require that the custodian conduct research to find documents. While each custodian can establish additional office practices, we caution against regularly performing research for people as it can create a risk of liability for the town if you make a mistake and miss a document that has been requested or send the wrong document.

7. The entrance checklist can be destroyed after five years. Vermont law provides that the entrance checklist from each election must be kept for five years following the election and a copy shall be made available upon request at cost to the public. 17 V.S.A. §2590. The entrance checklist must be kept out of the ballot bag and be available for inspection and copying under the supervision of the town clerk.

8. The ballot bag in a local election can be opened after 90 days. Vermont law permits a ballot bag to be opened by the town clerk after 90 days for a local election. 17 V.S.A. §2590. When opened, the ballots and tally sheets must be destroyed by the town clerk. The ballots cannot be inspected unless the town clerk is given a court order.

9. The ballot bag in a state election must be sealed for 22 months. The ballot bags must be kept sealed for 22 months following any election that includes federal offices (primary and general elections). At the end of that time period, the ballot bags can be opened and the ballots and tally sheets must be destroyed. 17 V.S.A. §2590. Ballots can be only inspected by a court order.

10. Proceedings are the same for all road reclassifications. Towns must go through all of the same statutory procedures to reclassify a highway whether the reclassification is an upgrade or whether it is to lower a classification or to abandon a road. 19 V.S.A. §§707-717. If a road is reclassified to class three, after the selectboard has gone through the necessary notice, hearing and decision, the town can use funds from its town highway budget to improve the road, if funds are available. A vote of the electorate is only required if additional funds are needed.

11. Citizens may petition to lay out, discontinue or reclassify a town road. The law provides that if at least five percent of a town’s voters and/or landowners petition to have a highway laid out, altered, reclassified, or discontinued the board must begin the statutory process. Note that even if the process is started by petition it is, in the first instance, within the board’s discretion whether to grant or deny the requested change. (Of course this decision can be appealed.) 19 V.S.A. §708. The selectboard may order that the petitioners pay the costs of upgrading a class four town highway to the class three town highway standards. 19 V.S.A. § 711.

12. Selectboard is not required to reclassify a class four road to a class three. In deciding whether to reclassify a road the selectboard makes a decision according to what it deems is the public good and necessity. The law specifically provides that a class four highway need not be reclassified to class three merely because there exists within a town one or more class three highways with characteristics similar to the class four highway. In considering whether to reclassify a class four highway to class three, consideration may be given as to whether the increased traffic and development potential likely to result from the reclassification is desirable or is in accordance with the town plan. 19 V.S.A. § 711.

13. Town manager has broad authority under state law. Chapter 37 of title 24 provides that the manager shall have authority and it shall be his duty: “to cause duties required of towns and town school districts and not committed to the care of any particular officer, to be duly performed and executed . . . and to perform all duties now conferred by law upon the selectmen . . . except that he shall not prepare tax bills, sign orders on the general fund of the town, other than orders for poor relief, call special or annual town meetings, lay out highways, establish and lay out public parks, make assessments, award damages, act as member of the board of civil authority, nor make appointments to fill vacancies which the selectmen are now authorized by law to fill.” 24 V.S.A. § 1236. In addition the manager is given specific areas of control listed in 24 V.S.A. section 1236 (including being the purchasing agent, supervising public buildings, accounting for the town and possibly for the school district, collecting the taxes and delinquent taxes – if the town so votes, overseeing the roads, the police and fire departments, maintenance of parks, etc . . .). 24 V.S.A. §1236.

14. Municipalities can set up recreation systems. There is a special area in the law devoted to municipal authority over recreation. It provides that municipalities, singly or jointly, may establish, maintain and conduct a system of public recreation including playgrounds. They can buy, lease or accept gifts of land, buildings or other recreational facilities, they can bond for these public improvements and they may hire a recreation director and assistant director. 31 V.S.A. § 202.



15. Municipal recreation programs can be overseen by the legislative body or by a recreation board. The legislative body of a municipality can oversee recreation themselves – or through their town manager or it can establish a recreation board. When the legislative body establishes the recreation committee or board it must decide how many members to include and it must determine the terms of office. The law requires that the terms be staggered so that the term of one member expires annually.

16. Felons can vote in Vermont and serve in elected office. With the exception of a conviction for voter or elections fraud, no Vermont law prohibits a felon from voting or serving as an elected official in Vermont. It is up to the voters to decide whether the felony conviction is reason to not elect a particular candidate to office.

17. Selectboard may go into executive session to discuss appointments of planning commissioners or other officials. The law permits a board to go into executive session to interview and discuss appointments to various public offices. The law provides that executive session is appropriate for the “the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee.” 1 V.S.A § 313.

18. Absent board members may vote by speaker phone. The open meeting law permits board members to participate in a board meeting by telephone, so long as they are on speaker phone. It is not uncommon for boards to proceed in this way when a board member is out of town or unable to physically attend to a meeting. 1 V.S.A. § 312 (a).

19. Listers may participate on the board of tax abatement unless they are providing evidence in the proceeding. The make-up of the board of tax abatement includes the listers of a town. However, in some matters the listers may be called upon to testify, particularly if the issue is whether there has been a “mistake of the listers.” This means that the listers have to make a choice for a particular proceeding - either they are sitting on the board of abatement or acting as a party to the proceedings. They cannot do both. If a lister is planning to act as a party to the proceeding (by testifying) then the lister cannot also participate and vote as a board member. 24 V.S.A. § 1533; 12 V.S.A. § 61.

20. Unruly members of the public may be removed. The chair of the board must do his or her best to keep order. When there are interested members of the public present, the chair should begin the meeting by laying out the ground rules - including information about when the public will be given time to be heard, that a person may only speak when they have been given the floor by the chair, and that topics that are unrelated to the agenda may be raised during “other business” at the end of the meeting (or whenever you put it on your agenda). The board, through its chair, can also limit the amount of time individuals can speak and say that no one speaks twice until everyone who wants to gets to speak once on the issue. A person who does not follow these rules may be removed by the constable or other local law enforcement.

21. Municipal public library may not charge residents for its basic services. A public library is defined as “any library established and maintained by a municipality or by a private association, corporation or group to provide basic library services free of charge to all residents of a municipality or a community and which receives its annual financial support in whole or in part from public funds. 22 V.S.A. § 101. This means that a municipal public library may not charge residents for its basic services. Basic services have been treated by the Vermont Department of Libraries as including all items a library circulates (e.g., print and nonprint materials), reference service, interlibrary loan, programming (except for recovery of the cost of materials), and public access computing (including internet access). This rule is consistent with the authority of other municipal entities. Municipal boards only have those authorities directly granted by the legislature. This means that fees cannot be charged by municipalities unless specifically authorized in statute or directly implied by some other authority granted by the legislature. Note that a municipal library may charge non-residents a borrowing fee and it may also charge rent in the event that it has extra space available for non-library use.

In our monthly Opinions, we provide what we believe the law requires based upon our legal judgment, years of observing Vermont's local government practices, and Vermont Court decisions. This information is intended as a reference guide only and should not replace the advice of legal counsel.

Municipal Calendar

MAY 2009

15 - Last day for town clerk to remit to state treasurer an accounting of dog and wolf-hybrid licenses sold and remit the license fee surcharge for a rabies control program. 20 V.S.A. § 3581(f).

25 - Memorial Day. 1 V.S.A. § 371(a).

JUNE 2009

1 - In towns using Australian Ballot, town clerk may open and destroy used town meeting ballots and tally sheets, except as otherwise provided by law (90 days after town meeting election). 17 V.S.A. § 2590(d).

1 - Deadline for listers to lodge property inventories with town clerk. 32 V.S.A. § 4007.

1 - (Within 60 days of petition) If a petition for reconsideration or rescission of a question considered or voted at town meeting has been filed, this is the last day on which a municipal vote may be held at a duly warned meeting. 17 V.S.A. § 2661(b).

4 - Last day for listers to lodge the grand list with town clerk for public inspection for towns of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. 32 V.S.A. §§ 4111(d), 4341.

24 - Last day for listers to lodge the grand list with town clerk for public inspection for towns of greater than 5,000 inhabitants. 32 V.S.A. §§ 4111(d), 4341.

30 - End of fiscal year for all school districts, charter provisions notwithstanding, and for municipalities that have adopted July 1 through June 30 fiscal year calendar. 32 V.S.A. § 1, 24 V.S.A. § 1683(b), (c).

30 - Reminder for town clerk in municipality with fiscal year ending June 30 to publicly disclose fees kept as compensation for that fiscal year by July 30th. 24 V.S.A. § 1179.

The Municipal Calendar is provided by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns/Chittenden Bank and the Secretary of State's Office.

Tip of the Month

Federal HAVA Grants Available to Municipalities



The Elections Division has recently sent out a mailing to all municipal clerks announcing that HAVA HHS grant money is now available. Interested municipalities need to submit an application for up to \$5,000 for funds to improve polling place accessibility for individuals with disabilities. These funds can be used to repair or construct ramps, install handicapped accessible doors or hardware, create handicapped accessible parking spaces, improve signage for handicapped parking spaces and entrances, or improve lighting in polling places. The application and more information can be downloaded from our website at <http://vermont-elections.org/elections1/hava.html>

Later this spring, the Elections Division will send out notices to municipal clerks announcing another round of general HAVA grant money that can be used to improve the administration of federal elections.

Each town will be able to apply for up to \$3,000 (or \$6,000 if the town has not applied for a previous general HAVA grant) in 2009. These funds can be used for purchase of equipment, faster internet connections, and/or training in Access or Excel in order to support more efficient and effective use of the statewide checklist. More details will be included with the formal announcement and will be available at <http://vermont-elections.org/elections1/hava.html> when the notices are mailed.

If you have a tip to share, contact John Cushing at jcushing@town.milton.vt.us.

Upcoming Events

BCA/JP Trainings

Secretary of State Deb Markowitz and municipal law attorney Charles Merriman will provide an overview of the duties of justices of the peace, and will discuss the tax assessment appeal process and abatement. All interested municipal officials are encouraged to attend. (This is the same training that was offered this past January to new justices of the peace.)

Tuesday, May 5, 4:00 to 5:30 pm - Rutland City Hall, Aldermans' Chambers, 1 Strongs Avenue
Thursday, May 14, 3:30 to 5:00 pm - Springfield Municipal Office, 96 Main Street
Tuesday, May 19, 3:30 to 5:00 pm - Newport, Gateway Building, 84 Fyfe Drive, 1st Floor
Wednesday, May 27, 3:00 to 4:30 pm - Caledonia Superior Court, 1126 Main Street, St. Johnsbury

To register, please contact your local municipal clerk. Cost is \$25.00 for one person, \$50.00 for two or more attendees from the same town. Space is limited. Deadline is 7 days prior to event. Directions and any cancellation notices will be posted on our website at <http://www.sec.state.vt.us/municipal/>.

Listers Education Courses - offered by the Vermont Tax Department

New Lister Training

Instructors: DAs

Wednesday, May 13, 2009 – Royalton Academy

Thursday, May 14, 2009 – Rutland Town Hall

Thursday, May 21, 2009 – Londonderry Town Hall

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Tuition: \$ 75.00 VT Town officers, \$ 100.00 Firms and others

These sessions are for newly elected listers or those who have never been through an entire year of listing activities. You will learn about the various responsibilities of the office including lodging a grand list, downloading homestead declarations, and the obligations of the office. Attention will be given to schedules, exemptions, current use calculation and property valuation. Registration form is available at <http://www.state.vt.us/tax/pvrlistereducation.shtml>, or call 802-828-5860 for more information.

Planning Commissioners' Summer Retreat

Start Date: Friday, June 5 and Saturday, June 6
Start Time: Event begins on Friday 6/5 at 3pm and ends on Saturday 6/6 at 3pm.
Place: Ohana Camp on Lake Fairlee in Fairlee, VT
Directions: <http://www.alohafoundation.org/article/view/20396/1/957/>
Coordinating Organization(s) Land Use Institute of the Vermont Law School <http://www.vermontlaw.edu/x3704.xml>
Cost: \$100 with some scholarships available
Contact: Alicia Cordero at Land Use Institute
Phone: (802) 763-1440
Email: acordero@vermontlaw.edu
Website: http://www.vermontlaw.edu/Academics/Environmental_Law_Center/Institutes_and_Initiatives/Land_Use_Institute/Events.htm

Summary: This is an opportunity for community leaders volunteering on their town planning commissions to network with cohorts while gaining innovative and inspirational information to bring back to their respective communities. The setting is a treat. Keynotes include Secretary of State Deb Markowitz and VT Law School land use professors: Tim Duane and Sean Nolon. Individuals will be rewarded for their volunteerism and gain advanced training.

Our partners include the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA), Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA), Smart Growth Vermont, Vermont Planners Association (VPA), the University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies and the Extension Service, the Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce and the Vermont Secretary of State's Office. The event is supported by a generous contribution from REM Development Co, LLC.

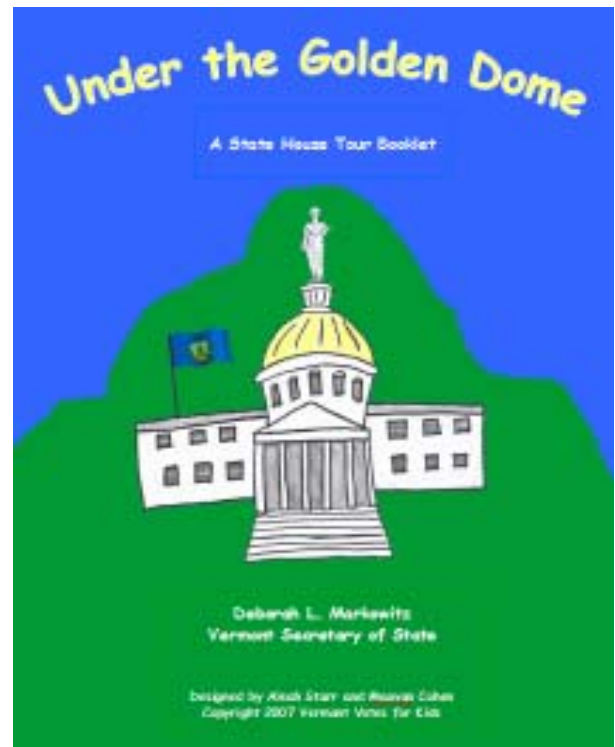
Civics Behind the Scenes

Missy Shea, Civics and Voter Outreach Coordinator

This morning I spent an hour with about 30 second and third graders at the Waitsfield Elementary School. They will be visiting the State House in May, and their teacher thought it would be helpful if I could come in and help them prepare. Since I live right up the road, it was a simple enough request. I was happy to do it.

The truth is I went in thinking I was doing the kids a favor, and came out knowing they had in fact helped me. I was inspired when I walked out of that building! Today's students, even the youngest ones, are smart, thoughtful, articulate, and not afraid to share what is on their minds.

I used the booklet *Under the Golden Dome* to frame my visit. It was produced by our office to teach younger students about the history and work done in the State House. I began our discussion by reviewing the role of a legislator as a law maker, and we talked about how and from where we get laws in the first place. I explained that every law starts as an idea, and goes through a specific process to become a law. I gave several examples of Vermont laws inspired by the work of Vermont students, such as the bus idling law and the fair labor uniforms law. Then we set to work brainstorming their ideas for new laws.



I was amazed at their responses! Hands shot up in the air. The first boy I called on said "No more war." One child questioned "Wouldn't that be hard to make it a law?" Another piped up "You need to have war to end war." And another retorted "That's dumb!" They were practicing debate and deliberation without even knowing what those words mean. I explained that there is a difference between a resolution and a bill, and I asked them

to think about factors such as whether an idea they had could actually be enforced as a law, whether it would cost a lot of money, and whether similar laws on that issue already existed.

They had ideas for laws to stop teen violence, not let people sell drugs on the street to kids, disallow cell phone use while driving, vandalism, all kinds of things. One student even made a proposition about trade regulation - "People should only be allowed to sell and buy things that are properly licensed." As a generation of video watchers, they were all very familiar with the federal warning that movies are copy written, and should not be reproduced for illegal profit.

Their visit isn't for a few weeks yet, and they still have some more preparation to do before they visit Montpelier. But I have no doubt that when these young students arrive at the State House, their heads will be filled with big ideas about how to make Vermont an even better place to live.

Vermont High School Voter Registration Week

May 18-22, 2009

Vermont's High School Voter Registration Week is May 18-22. The Secretary of State's Office designates a special week each spring to encourage schools to use the time to hold a registration drive, or plan for one in the future. It is critical that we teach students about voting because, whether they plan to head off to further education, work, or the armed services, each student will emerge from high school as a young adult, with an important role to play in society.

Many states have undertaken initiatives to increase youth voter registration and participation, including legislation that lowers the age of registration for those who will meet the eligibility requirements by the time of the next federal election. In 2007, Californian Assemblyman Joseph Coto introduced a bill that makes voter registration a requirement for high school graduation. The New America Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan public policy institute, endorsed the idea:

"Because students in effect are a "captive audience," high schools are an ideal place for engaging young people and incorporating them into our representative democracy. If young people are not hooked into democratic institutions and practices while they're in high school, it becomes more difficult to do so after they leave high school. And if they are not on the voter rolls then it is nearly impossible for candidates or political organizations to contact or engage them directly. Their lack of participation results in a "disengagement cycle" that becomes increasingly difficult to break. High school in many cases is the final opportunity to fully engage young people about participating in our democracy. Having common sense practices for engaging young people in high school is crucial."

Secretary Markowitz has long understood the importance of young voter participation. The Secretary of State's Office has been providing voter education and registration support for years now. High School Voter Registration Week is a wonderful opportunity for new voters to be guided through the registration process. By working with their local high schools, town clerks are a wonderful resource for getting students prepared to vote. But collaborating with schools to run registration drives also helps the clerk, because clerk involvement ensures that correct information is being given and the process is being properly followed. Such collaboration leads to a smooth inclusion on the voter checklist, and an easier time at the polls on election day for all involved.

If there is not a voter registration connection between the town clerk and the local high school where you live, please consider volunteering your time to help create one. The future of our democracy will benefit from it, and you'll feel great.



For more information about voter outreach and civics education, contact Missy Shea at 802-828-1296, mshea@sec.state.vt.us, or visit www.sec.state.vt.us.

Mailing List Updates!

Help us keep our mailing list up to date!

Let us know if:

- your address needs to be updated,
- your name is misspelled, or
- you'd rather receive *Opinions* a week early via email.



Send us a note via fax: 802-828-2496,

email: gcolbert@sec.state.vt.us,

or post: 26 Terrace St., Montpelier, VT 05609-1101.

Be sure to include the information from your current *Opinions* mailing label as well as any changes that you would like to have made.

Thank you for helping us keep Opinions running efficiently!

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