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## **Good Government Solutions and Earned Trust**

**By VT Secretary of State Jim Condos**

Smart, focused and efficient government helps Vermonters, so why does it seem that levels of frustration and distrust are at an all-time high? I believe that listening to your customers, cutting red tape, finding efficiencies, and increasing transparency are all keys to earning that trust.

At the Secretary of State's Office, we serve Vermonters in many ways, including: overseeing the state's elections, registering its businesses, licensing its professionals, managing its records, providing information, assistance and educational materials related to municipal and open government laws.

We balance these critical priorities with Vermonters' ability to afford them – ensuring fee revenue is spent wisely. Recent news about broken contracting practices, failed Information Technology (IT) projects, and budget deficits are discouraging and don't inspire confidence.

In my time as a City Councilor (18 years), State Senator (8 years), and Secretary of State (5+ years), I've heard it all regarding government reforms and efficiency. I am encouraged by recent conversations about change and meaningful reform. However, experience tells me – be skeptical – good intentions often become superficial calls to action that do not translate to real structural, long-term solutions.

The Secretary of State's Office has worked hard to fulfill its mission while upholding high standards, increasing efficiency while providing quality customer service. Our talented staff works smart and implements creative and flexible solutions to business problems.

We have successfully completed four technology projects by focusing on solutions meeting the needs of the customers and the agency while improving cohesiveness and integration, creating efficiencies and reducing redundancies. We have implemented a new website and major overhauls of IT systems for three Divisions – Professional Regulation, Corporations, and Elections.

These projects reduce processing times, eliminate paper/postage, and increase the public's access to information. Our implementations succeed because we "measure twice and cut once." Before we go out to bid on a project, we study and improve our business processes and focus on customer service, and public protection.

Government must review its mission, strategy, and processes, then streamline as necessary to right-size its programs. Regulation should be risk-based and implemented only when absolutely necessary. It's not acceptable to follow a process because "we've always done it that way." With every existing practice, we must ask "Why?" and "What are we trying to accomplish?"

More than 30 years' experience in the business sector taught me the value of listening to customers and front-line staff to achieve excellence in customer service. This instills confidence and trust, providing for stability and predictability.

I've spent countless hours talking about transparency in towns across the state, aimed at improving openness and accountability. Transparency in government drives:

- Measurable results and outcomes – engaging in clear and respectful exchanges with external and internal customers and stakeholders;
- Breaking down government silos – ending the old entrenched ways which will allow us to pool resources;
- Public confidence – by letting the sun shine in, we achieve greater accountability, prevent overspending and inappropriate contracting; and
- An authentic culture of accountability in government – as the Vermont Constitution demands!

There are many opportunities for the State to listen to Vermonters, streamline its programs, and open its doors to inspection, constructive criticism, and improvement. By focusing on our core functions and mission, we improve the essentials.

Hard work, efficiency and common sense solutions are not Republican, Progressive or Democratic values; they are Vermont values. Here at the Secretary of State's office, we work hard every day to uphold these values and strive to promote confidence in government through excellent customer service, innovation, and accountability.

I believe if our government is transparent, accountable and focused, it can improve Vermonters' lives and earn their trust and respect.

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