

December 10th, 2023

VERMONT STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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**Follow my work in the Vermont
House of Representatives:**

[Vermont Legislature Website](#)
[My Voting Record](#)



Good evening and Happy Hanukkah to those that celebrate,

A few updates from November and December and a beginning look at some of the issues I expect the legislature to take up in the 2024 Session. **Items in bold are usu links.** Please don't miss an important public hearing on Act 250 this week and three reports that would shake up Act 250 and land use as we



Updated Office Hours for Laura

Thursday December 14, 6-7 pm at
the Jamaica Town Office

Thursday December 21, 6-7 pm at
the Wardsboro Library (**virtual
only**)

Thursday January 18, 6-7 pm
Wardsboro Library (I'll be virtual
and anyone in the district can join
virtually or at the library)

Saturday February 3, 11-noon Dover
Library

These times are open to the public and
Vermonters are welcome to come ask
questions or share insights.



*I have been assigned by the Speaker of
the House to the House **Environment
and Energy Committee** this year –
the bills above the committee is either
working on or I am preparing for in
case they are taken up.*

**Office of Governor Phil
Scott**

know it. This will be a major focus in my
committee this year.

The **Renewable Energy Standard
Working Group** has continued to meet
with legislators, looking at how to update
Vermont's existing Renewable Energy
Standard. This standard has been in
place for a number of years, and was
intended to increase the amount of
renewable and clean electricity powering
our homes and businesses. The work is
tightly balanced between:

- regulated distribution
utilities need to keep the
lights on and keep
downward pressure on
rates as our energy policies
and climate goals are
incentivizing greater
electrification of heating
and transportation
- the renewable energy and
battery storage industry
need to retain workforce
and market in order to
install equipment needed
to electrify.
- state, regional and
national environmental
advocates efforts to reduce
greenhouse gas emissions

The requirements on utilities and
procurement programs are all under
consideration and negotiation amongst
the parties. A facilitator has been
engaged in helping to mediate the off
session meetings. **Polling from the
Department of Public Service**,
showed that reliability and affordability
of services were the highest priority for
Vermonters.

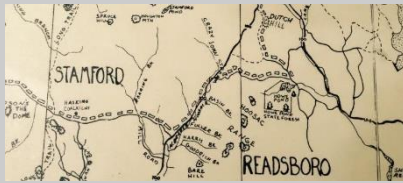
I'm optimistic that a modest
modernization effort will keep our
utilities and industry in better sync in the
coming years.

The **Joint Infrastructure Oversight
Committee** which I sit on has also been
meeting to hear updates on Vermont's
major IT projects that are underway as
well as projects that are needed. This
work is led by the Vermont **Agency of
Digital Services** which has liaisons
within every agency of state government.
The legislature's Joint Fiscal Office

Website



Watch legislative committees



Town Websites

[Dover](#)

[Jamaica](#)

[Stratton](#)

[Wardsboro](#)



Regional Resources

Windham County

[BDCC - Regional](#)

[Development](#)

[WRC - Regional Planning](#)



employs and IT professional to help legislators conduct the job of oversight on the administration and use of tax dollars.

Here are some of the key projects we have been hearing about:

- Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles: **COMPLETED:** 50+ year old mainframe as system of record for vehicle registration and title information, point of sale, Image retrieval, Point-of-Sale, Microsoft Access 97 databases **NEXT:** VT Photo Identification Credentialing System (VT PICS), Appointment scheduling and customer queuing, 50+ year old mainframe as system of record for driver license suspension/reinstatement s & parking placard information, Microsoft Access 97 databases
- Unemployment Insurance: This project is expected to beginning early this Spring and replacement will take place in two phases: Phase 1: Tax and Phase 2: Benefits. Each phase will be completed in approximately 12 – 18 months.
- Integrated Eligibility: Vermonters access to health care and economic assistance benefits – this system relies on federal funding and oversight and has a plan for modernization for the next decade.
- Enterprise Resource Planning: This system handles a number of business processes for state government:
Financial: The financial systems manage, track and report on the State's finances, Budget, and compliance and Human

State Resources

[Department of Health](#)

[Department of Labor](#)

[Agency of Commerce](#)

[Department of Motor Vehicles](#)

[Department of Taxes](#)

[Department of Public Service](#)

[Secretary of State](#)

[Veterans Affairs](#)

[Department of Children & Families](#)



If you're a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one, there are caring, qualified VA responders standing by to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



You aren't alone <https://vthelplink.org/>

The word "Vermonger" does not describe a political party, a religion, a race or a gender.

We're all in this together.

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Vermont House sessions

The public can also watch the Vermont House legislative sessions live (Jan-May) or

Capital Management: Human Resource systems that manage employee information, benefits, payroll, learning, and resource recruitment. This system is expected to be operational in late winter of 2025, Grants Management: Grants Management are tools used by Agencies and Departments for fiscally managing, tracking, and reporting on State grants.

Education Finance

In case you missed my latest opinion piece on the real challenges and unhelpful political commentary from Montpelier that school boards across Vermont are facing : **Rep. Sibilia: About that December 1 Letter from the Tax Commissioner...**

Many factors are coming together to make this a difficult year across the state for property taxes. One of these issues are the roll in of the corrected pupil weights, a calculation that balances statewide need with statewide funding. **Many schools in our region were GROSSLY underfunded while taxpayers in some instances were GROSSLY overpaying because of a flaw since inception in the formula.** As those corrected weights finally roll in, we should be seeing some property tax relief and headroom for investment. However, large wealthy districts that have benefitted from this flaw for decades are being protected from shocks in their budgets, with only a 5% decrease in their equalized pupil counts – this will have the effect of raising statewide spending this year. It is important to note, those who benefitted from this flaw, did so through no fault of their own. The extraordinary confidence of a handful of powerful policymakers, who would not acknowledge the flaw in their creation, kept adjustment and relief at bay for more than a decade. As a long time school board member myself, I believe most boards do the best they can for kids with the resources that are available to them, being careful of the aspect of the budget and tax rates that they have control over. The property tax

recorded videos – information below

Tuesday at 10:00 AM; Wednesday at 1:15 PM; Thursday at 1:15 PM; Friday at 9:30 AM (All times subject to change)

MORE HOUSE INFORMATION
Listen to VPR House Live Audio
Watch House Live Video

See what bills I have sponsored and voting record,
or watch my **committee hearings** or **Listen to VPR House Live Audio** or **Watch House Live Video**



Pride Center of Vermont, Outright Vermont and **Out in the Open** are sites with accurate and useful LGBTQ+ information and resources to Vermonters.



issues we are facing this year are heavily state and national issue related.

Expect to hear more on this issue during this session from Montpelier and your school boards.

All Legislative Briefing

This briefing happens in early December each year to update the legislature on current economic and revenue trends, budget performance and other key topics – this year the status of federal aid and a housing panel. Click the links for the presentations made to House and Senate.



- **Economic and Revenue Review** by Tom Kavet | All Legislative Briefing – December 1, 2023
- **Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Context** by Joint Fiscal Office
- **Fundamentals of Federal Aid to Vermont** by Marcia Howard, Federal Funds Information for the States

Veteran's Care
Starting Jan. 17, Veterans
in suicidal crisis can go to
any VA or non-VA health
care facility for free
emergency health care at
no cost – including inpatient
or crisis residential care for up
to 30 days and outpatient care
for up to 90 days. Veterans do
not need to be enrolled



Travels this Fall from top to bottom:
Honoring our Vermont Guard at the
Vermont National Guard Military Ball
with Senator and Mrs. Leahy, Vermont
Adjutant General Greg Knight and
fellow National Guard and Veterans
Affairs Caucus Co-Chairs Rep. Lisa
Hango and Rep. Matt Birong. At the
Ball Mountain Dam with Senator
Wendy Harrison. At the first U.S.
Broadband Summit listening to
Vermont's Christa Shute and Gigi Sohn
of the Public Broadband Institute. In
Readsboro with Omar Smith at the
official launch of DVFiber's Windham
Region build out, At the Gilfeather
Turnip Festival in Wardsboro with
award winning Secretary of Agriculture
Anson Tebbets. With Rural Caucus
leadership at the Vermont League of
Cities and Towns Annual Town Fair
receiving an award on behalf of our 50

- **Housing Panel –
Presentation**

December Celebrations

- Hannukah: Jewish Festival of Lights commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem with the lighting of the menorah from December 7th to December 15th in 2023.
- Yule: Pagan and Wiccan celebration around December 21st, marking the winter solstice and return to longer days with rituals symbolizing light's triumph over darkness.
- Christmas: Celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25th.
- Kwanzaa: December 26th to January 1st, created in the U.S. to honor African-American culture, emphasizing seven principles, including unity and creativity.

Heating Fuel Costs and Fuel Assistance

HERE is information about Vermont Fuel and Energy Assistance programs if you need assistance and meet income guidelines (approximately 65,000 for a family of 4 which equates to expected income for two FT jobs at \$15 per hour)

Federal and state data shows that heating fuel prices in Vermont are at \$4.16, down from \$4.83 one year ago. These prices are still almost a dollar per gallon higher than two Decembers ago when prices hovered around 3.12. This despite record profits in 2022.

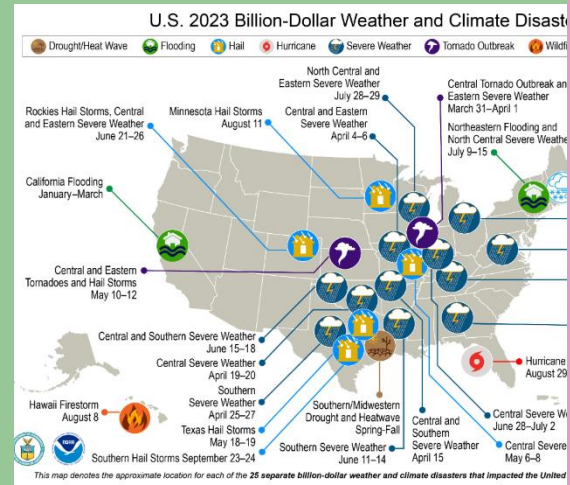
"Big Oil more than doubled its profits in 2022 to \$219 billion, smashing previous records in a year of volatile energy prices where Russia's invasion of Ukraine reshaped global energy markets and, in some cases, the industry's climate ambitions."

members for our work on Act 250 in 2023.



-REUTERS: **BIG OIL DOUBLES PROFITS IN BLOCKBUSTER 2022**

Rep. Sibilia, Secretary Natural Resources Julie Moore and Jared Duval of the Energy Action Network talk about energy transition in Manchester



The U.S. has sustained 373 weather and climate disasters since 1980 where overall damages/costs reached or exceeded \$1 billion (including CPI adjustment to 2023). **The total cost of these 373 events exceeds \$2.655 trillion.** The map above depicts the 25 separate billion dollar weather and climate disasters in the U.S. in 2023.

VT Digger: **Private Christian school sues over state policy on transgender athletes**

Mid Vermont Christian School in Quechee is challenging Vermont's rules on transgender athletes in high school sports, and is asking the court to take action to prevent the school from being excluded from a taxpayer funded tuition program.



NRB to host online public meeting on Act 250 Legislative study

The Natural Resources Board will host an online public meeting to present its draft legislative report “**Necessary Updates to the Act 250 Program.**” The online public meeting will be held Thursday, December 14, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. EST. A link to participate in the online meeting can be accessed [here](#).

Act 182 of 2022 and **Act 47** of 2023 directed the Natural Resources Board with reporting to the House Committees on Environment and Energy and Ways and Means and the Senate Committees on Finance and Natural Resources and Energy on “necessary updates to the Act 250 program,” on or before December 31, 2023.

In June, the NRB and its **facilitation team** convened a stakeholder Steering Committee to help the NRB design and implement a robust process for stakeholder input and build consensus among stakeholders with divergent perspectives.

Under the terms of Act 182 and Act 47, the NRB’s report to the legislature shall include:

1. How to transition to a system in which Act 250 jurisdiction is based on location, which shall encourage development in designated areas, the maintenance of intact rural working lands, and the protection of natural resources of statewide significance, including

biodiversity. Location-based jurisdiction would adjust the threshold for Act 250 jurisdiction based on the characteristics of the location. This section of the report shall consider whether to develop thresholds and tiers of jurisdiction as recommended in the Commission on **Act 250: the Next 50 Years Report**.

2. **How to use the Capability and Development Plan to meet the statewide planning goals.**
3. **An assessment of the current level of staffing of the Board and District Commissions, including whether there should be a district coordinator located in every district.**
4. **Whether the permit fees are sufficient to cover the costs of the program and, if not, a recommendation for a source of revenue to supplement the fees.**
5. **Whether the permit fees are effective in providing appropriate incentives.**
6. **Whether the Board should be able to assess its costs on applicants.**
7. **Whether increasing jurisdictional thresholds for housing development to 25 units would affect housing affordability, especially for primary homeownership, and what the potential impact of increasing those thresholds to 25 units would have on natural and community resources addressed under**

**existing Act 250
criteria.**

8. A proposed framework for delegating administration of Act 250 permits to municipalities.
9. Public input and feedback on draft recommendations will be incorporated into the report.

More information on the report can be found at **Necessary Updates to the Act 250 Program** on the NRB website. Questions or comments may be submitted to the **NRB General inbox**. Deadline for submission is December 15, 2023.

**RPC report on the concept of
Municipal Delegation of Act 250**

A draft report on the Municipal Delegation Framework by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA), dated November 14, 2023. The report was submitted to the Vermont Legislature as per their request in **Act 47 of 2023**. The report discusses the concept of Municipal Delegation in the Act 250 Process and its relation to other Act 47 studies. The report also provides a draft Act 250 Criteria and Municipal Regulation Crosswalk, Possible Permits Related to Act 250 Permitting, and a Technical Memo on Proposed Delegation of Act 250. You can access the report directly from **here**.

Vermont Designation Program Study

Designation 2050 Design

Summit event that took place on September 12, 2023. The event was organized by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency and aimed to bring together local officials, planners, business and property owners, and statewide leaders to discuss the future of Vermont's designation programs. The draft report is **here**

**Welcoming our New American
Neighbors**

The attack on three Palestinian students in Burlington has heightened concerns among Vermont's New American

neighbors. The Executive Director of the region's refugee resettlement agency recently informed the Windham County Legislative Delegation that some of our Southern Vermont New American neighbors are worried about safety and acceptance in wearing traditional attire. Collectively we can all help dispel anxieties, ensuring everyone feels welcome and safe to share their cultures openly. If you see New Americans out with their families or at work in our region, remember that a smile is a nearly universal sign of friendliness.

The paragraph above can be translated to Dari, Pashtu and Arabic **here**

پورته پاراگراف په پښتو او دري ژباړل
كيدى شى دلته
بند فوق را مى توانيد به دري و دري و در
اينجا ترجمه كنيد
يمكن ترجمة الفقرة أعلاه إلى الداريجة
والبشتو والعربية هنا

As always, if you have suggestions, concerns or critiques please be in touch so we can schedule time to discuss.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need assistance navigating government services at (802) 384-0233 or **lsibilia@leg.state.vt.us**. Follow my regular posts online at **http://www.laurasibiliavt.com**

Rep. Laura Sibilia – Dover, Jamaica, Somerset, Stratton, Wardsboro