

## 1.18.24 TA VT Statewide Call Notes

Facilitator: Robert Small

Note Taker: Laurel Green

Attendance: (25 total) John, Shaun, Beebe, Walter K (middlebury), Patrick, Steve, Becky, Jud, Roni D and Sucosh N (Warren), Peter B (Williston), Lucia Z (Rockingham), Steve, Linda, Dina, Dalia, Knud, Beth, Becky, Nannah sp?, Fran, Perry H, David, Barb T.

### Welcome and Check in

#### **Legislative Process and How to Engage - Patrick Flood**

**Why this talk?** Vermont has an open government, just walk into the middle of it. Vermont legislators are ordinary people, not professional politicians. Some work, some retired. They care, are willing to spend the time, and live in our communities. Feel free to talk to them, approach them because they expect it.

**How does it work?** Basics, two houses with the Senate and House. Meets 5 months yearly (January to May) in biennium or 2 year blocks. This year is the second year of the biennium. A bill introduced in 1st year of biennium stays active through the second year. Example - Divestment Bill passed the Senate last year and will continue this year. It has to pass both houses. And changes from the second house will have to go through the Committee of Conference to negotiate the single version of the bill.

There is a Crossover date - bills have to pass one or the other house by Crossover, around Town Meeting day in early March.

The Speaker of the House controls which bills come to the floor - lots of power. Currently a very effective leader and passing controversial legislation and overridden 7 gubernatorial vetoes. A total of 150 members in the House. Senate has 30 members - Senate Protem is the manager of the Senate and the Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate.

Legislation can be introduced by any legislator. 100s of bills get introduced but only a few get action. A bill is put “on the wall” and may never be taken up by a committee. The Committee Chairperson choose which bill to take up and who gets to testify on a particular bill. A conversation with the Committee Chair is really important to get in to testify.

Legislators have to run for reelection every two years. One third of this legislature has  $\frac{1}{3}$  new members. They have no office or staff at the State House. They have to study the bills and therefore rely on experts and activists to explain the details of a particular bill. Keep our message simple and straightforward to conserve their time (one page with bullet points that we want them to pay attention to will work best.)

The Legislative Council will draft up the bill in legal language. These are paid state employees.

**How to interact with your legislators?** Approach them, call at their home. They’re usually good at getting back to constituents. Doesn’t take much to get their attention because most voters never contact them. A few calls on one bill can really affect them. Send them written material, envelope and stamp works (more memorable than the overwhelming number of emails). Visit them at the State House, attend a hearing in their committees. You can watch hearings online and listen to the testimony. These are archived so you can go back to them later. This has opened the democratic process up dramatically.

If they hold constituent meetings in their district, bring up issues important to you, say the number of the bill, say why it is important to you. You don’t need to say a lot of detail. Do say you want them to support the bill. Offer more information in follow up with more detail in writing.

If you go to the State House, learn which room the committee will be meeting, go in and meet the staff person for the committee important to you. Introduce yourself and make friends.

## **Sharing the Vermont Legislative Website**

Online and easy to use, tons of information. [Vermont Legislative Website](#)

Examples:

Search function - by keyword, committees, legislator, etc.

Click and read all you want!

As as a member of Third Act Vermont we want you to feel confident talking with your legislator. We want you to understand the process, so when we need you to contact your legislator - you will feel comfortable doing so. You can have impact in the legislative process and policy.

Questions and comments - Shaun will add the link on the Third Act Vermont [website](#). We'll have a newsletter space for important links.

Jud - concerns about letters in envelopes at federal level. A postcard might be very effective!

Dina - Thanks for info on how to contact legislators - use text messages, too!

**Legislative Action Team** - we are reviewing all the bills and will draft positions on these bills, run by the Coordinating Committee, if they agree with the draft, then we will make our position known to Legislative members and ask for their support.

**Divestment Action Team** is a subset working on S.42, the Divestment bill, which would divest fossil fuels from Vermont state pension funds. They are making a strategy of how to pass that bill in the House with the ability to override a potential Governor veto.

Steve - it's not too early to let your legislators know you are in favor of the divestment bill. If you are a member of the Vermont Pension System (state employees, school employees, and most municipal employees), there is a special role for you! Please contact [steve.crofter@gmail.com](mailto:steve.crofter@gmail.com)  
802-275-4646

If you are interested in joining the Legislative Action Team let Patrick know  
pflood001@aol.com

**Mass Movement in Montpelier** Sat. Jan. 27, 1 - 3, at the Statehouse  
“Vermonters together for a better future” Multi-issue event, social justice,  
peace, migrant justice, climate, and democracy.

Show the intersectionality of all these groups - all comes together across  
the groups, stronger together! Pushing against corporate power and  
pushing for people and the planet.

Gather at 12:30 for the March from City Hall to Statehouse, Brass Balagan  
will lead the march (Fun!)

Speeches, Music and tables. Need a few volunteers to spell the folks at  
table. Carpooling available on 350 VT website.

Mark your calendar. Register on the 350 Vermont [website](#)

Stop by the TA VT table. Carry a banner or signs in the march. Pray for  
good weather.

Alternate date is Feb. 3 if bad weather. Information is in the most recent TA  
VT [newsletter](#).

Next Third Act Vermont Statewide Meeting, Thursday, February 15, 4:30 -  
6:00 Please join us!