

Ethan Allen Institute

Newsletter – September 2018 (Printer Edition)

Top Stories

Kids Love Liberty Camp!

By Rob Roper

This marks the second year the Ethan Allen Institute participated in putting on a summer Liberty Camp for middle school students, and it fast becoming our favorite event. We had eight students who absolutely blew us away with their enthusiasm, smarts, and willingness to tackle some big concepts about the founding principals of our great nation.

Liberty Camp is a three morning program, this one taking place in Rutland at Mount St. Joseph's High School, consisting of lessons and games designed to teach young people about the founding of the United States and the rights and principals upon which our government and citizens operate.

The first day focused on the early settlers who formed the Colonies, what drove them to leave their native lands and what they hoped to find and build in the New World. We talked about what kind of character it took not just to make this leap of faith, but to build a life and a society with few laws and no safety net: individualism, cooperation, self-sufficiency, and a strong work ethic.

Day two took on the Declaration of Independence and a discussion of those rights endowed by our Creator to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These were revolutionary concepts for their time and are just as relevant today as they were then.

On our last day we delved into how our founders constructed a government designed to preserve these rights with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, finishing up with a mock Constitutional Convention. The kids embraced their roles as delegates to the Continental Congress with tremendous enthusiasm, adopting appropriate accents and improvising some passionate and insightful speeches.

We have many people to thank for their help in putting this program together. We are grateful to Mount St. Joseph's for allowing us to use their space, Zachary Zupan for assisting in the instruction, Terry Burke and Bradford Broyles for doing the heavy lifting of getting all the logistics organized in Rutland, Carol Frenier, Linda Kirker, and Lenore Broughton for being the brains and inspiration behind Liberty Camp, and most of all the kids for participating and their parents for making them (at least on the first day).

We are looking forward to next year, and are starting our planning process earlier. If you are interested in this program or know someone who might be, please let us know. rob@ethanallen.org

Roll Call Profiles

Carbon Tax Profiles

Commentary: The Perfect Little Climate Conscious State

By John McLaughry

A year ago, Gov. Scott created a Climate Action Commission in response to clamor generated by the state's environmental organizations determined to make Vermonters take bold action to defeat the Menace of Climate Change, which they insist "is a fundamental threat to Vermont."

The Governor tasked the Commission with delivering "an action plan aimed at reaching the State's renewable energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals while driving economic growth, setting Vermonters on a path to affordability, and ensuring effective energy transition options exist for all Vermonters."

That greenhouse gas reduction goal, mandated by Act 168 of 2006, is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 50 percent of their 1990 levels by 2028. In 2015 Vermont's emissions had risen to 16 percent above 1990 levels, not 50 percent below. Driving down CO2 emissions in the futile hope of defeating climate change has become an enviro obsession.

The Report released July 30 is a sweeping and well written 85 page compendium of every conceivable step needed to make Vermont the Perfect Little Climate Conscious State. It includes and advocates practically every proposal urged on Vermonters by the environmental phalanx since 1970, plus a number of new enthusiasms sparked by the debatable belief that human carbon dioxide emissions are driving the planet toward heat death.

First, the Report extols the merits of "smart growth principles". This is the "everything in its proper place" notion that underlay Act 250's proposed State Land Use Plan in 1970, and Gov. Kunin's ominous "new planning era" of 1987 (Act 200), where anything of consequence occurs only in conformity with a government plan "uniform in standards, specific in requirements, and tough on delinquents."

To attain this eternal goal, the government needs to take control or ownership of lots more Vermont land, that otherwise would be irresponsibly used by selfish, shortsighted landowners oblivious to the principles of smart growth.

The Report touts the merits and opportunities presented by a "New Climate Economy", which a cynic might define as "lots of people making money from the government forcing lots of other people to pay."

Reducing CO2 emissions requires transformation of the transportation sector that produces 43% of them. That means programs to support walking and biking, plus getting people to choose electric vehicles instead of gasoline or diesel powered vehicles. The Report strongly supports a network of fast-charging stations for EVs, electric transit and school buses, and even commuter rail "when it becomes viable" (when unicorns fly).

It doesn't mention the awkward fact that EVs pay no fuel tax or registration surcharge to support the highway system, leaving that to the gas and diesel powered vehicles the Report wants to do away with. Nor does the Report explain where the additional gigawatt hours of renewable electricity will come from, to keep all the subsidized EVs on the road.

The Report urges doubling of low-income home weatherization programs to reduce fuel consumption, claiming that it will save homeowners lots of money over the

long run. So why not capitalize the projected fuel savings to pay for the upfront weatherization? There are contractors in Vermont now that do just that for businesses, but the state is committed to sending the home weatherization bill to ratepayers and taxpayers, and letting the homeowners pocket all of the savings.

Looming in the shadows is the One Big Idea for Fighting Climate Change, that will drive down CO2 emissions and pay all the costs of adopting the 53 recommendations. That idea is The Carbon Tax.

Mindful that Gov. Scott is dead set against every form of carbon taxes, “fees”, “caps” and “pricing”, the Report manages only to say that driving down CO2 emissions “will require hard choices. We can reform and equalize our tax system to induce behavior change, we can mandate change through statutory or regulatory action, we can let the market efficiently allocate prices through a system like cap and invest or carbon pricing, or we can accept that we will not meet our goals through voluntary action in the current market where the price of carbon is not properly accounted for in the costs of our goods and services.”

The Commission then warns: “unless there is significant progress in greenhouse gas emission reductions, Vermont should institute additional, wide scale measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

What you won’t find in the Report is a summary of all the costs of the many programs, incentives and subsidies, including the salaries of what must be thousands of bureaucrats and contractors employed in identifying, measuring, recording, advising, regulating, permitting, subsidizing, policing, and so on to make sure that everybody gets with the “New Climate Economy”.

And you won’t find a trace of the traditional Vermont belief that free people, secure in their property, acting within the law to pursue their dreams, will best contribute to a free and prosperous tomorrow for their children. The urgent need to defeat climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions – no matter how utterly undetectable the results – is now in the driver’s seat.

- John McClaughry is vice president of the Ethan Allen Institute

Commentary: The Media is not “The Press”

By Rob Roper

Recently hundreds of news publications around the country, including several here in Vermont, participated a coordinated editorial campaign decrying criticism aimed against the media. Their general complaint is over the president accusing them repeatedly of being “fake news” and an “enemy of the people,” allegations which they describe as dangerous attacks on a “free press.” As one prominent Vermont editorialist wrote, “A free, fact-based press was built right into the foundations of that when the First Amendment was adopted in 1791.” This view misunderstands the Constitutional right.

The “freedom of the press” referred to in the Bill of Rights is a concept, not a class of people, i.e. journalists. It is a fundamental right that applies equally to all citizens. It does not carve out a special class of uber-citizens who have more rights and protections of expression than the rest of us because they get a paycheck from the New York Times, CNN or your local Vermont media outlet.

We all, as citizens, have an equal Constitutional right not only to say what we think -- freedom of speech -- but also the right to print and distribute those thoughts as we see fit -- freedom of the press (as well as the right to come together and exercise these rights in coordination with other like-minded citizens -- freedom to peaceably assemble -- but let's stick with the concept of free press for now). If you're free to say it, you're free to write it down, and/or, with today's technology, put it in a video, on the radio, in a meme, in a tweet, and free to circulate those thoughts as far and wide as you can. "Congress shall make no law" abridging this right.

Is everything everybody prints going to be politely presented, rationally thought out, or always accurate? Sadly, no, but this is the nature of a free press, and it is one of the key pillars that makes our country unique, special and great. This right of expression is enjoyed by everybody, from the president with his Twitter account to the guy on the street corner holding aloft a "Repent! The end is near!" sign scribbled with lipstick on a discarded pizza box. Whether we like them or not, the president's Tweets challenging the media, as well as everybody else's, are not dangerous to the Constitutional right to a free press, but an exercise of it. Again, like them or not.

Another prominent Vermont editorialist describes these criticisms of the media as, "... dangerous to the nation's democracy because his intent is to undermine the very notion of reliable and trustworthy news." Reliable and trustworthy news is extremely valuable and important, but not being able to stand up to criticism does not make something either reliable or trustworthy. The opposite is so. Would this editorialist cease and desist from harsh criticism of politicians because undermining faith in our political leaders and institutions is dangerous to our democracy? I hope not.

All of these editorialists (at least the several that I read) accused the president of being a "dictator," a "tyrant," and a "danger to our democracy." How is this any different than accusing someone of being an "enemy of the people"? In my humble opinion, both sides are engaging in some serious and unproductive hyperbole, but, that is their right. We, as citizens, can question whether or not it is a responsible exercise of that right.

If the president were actually a dictator, such as a Hitler or a Stalin, every late night comedian would certainly have been publicly hanged by now, or at least packed off to a gulag somewhere in the Alaskan tundra. But, in reality, nobody is using the power of government to stop anybody from saying or printing anything they choose. Nobody is threatening their right to a free press.

However, if what members of the media want and expect is a protected monopoly to decide what information people get and what people think about it, and to de-platform those who criticize them or have different opinions, that is not a right protected by the Constitution.

Unfortunately, this appears to be what some major media outlets are petitioning social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube to do to citizens -- use their power to silence those with whom they disagree. This, arguably (arguably because these are corporations not Congress making rules), is a violation of citizens' rights to free press. If not in absolute legal terms, certainly in spirit. Cutting off the voices of citizens is actually a danger to democracy, and I hope the media will take as strong a stand for their readers' free press rights as they have for their own.

The statement, "I disagree with what you say, but I will defend with my life your right to say it," best sums up the spirit behind our unique rights as American citizens to free speech and free press. It is an attitude of mutual respect that I hope we can all

reestablish, remembering always that our rights to expression are not just a two-way street, but the entire national transportation system.

- *Rob Roper is president of the Ethan Allen Institute.*

Events

Sept 7. Rob Roper will meet with students from Middlebury College at the Statehouse to discuss the Ethan Allen Institute and the benefits of free markets.

Sept. 12. At the North Hero's courthouse, David Flemming will be giving a presentation to the Grand Isle County GOP on the economic issues that will likely to be taken up by the legislature in 2019, such as the ESSEX carbon tax.

News & Views

Overcharged, the new Cato health care book reviewed by John McClaughry in his column of July 30, has its own web site with excerpts and comments from health care policy leaders (including John). <https://www.cato.org/overcharged>

Prominent Representatives Call for Carbon Tax. Within a one week period, two Vermont Representatives, [Mike Yantachka](#) (D-Charlotte) and [Mary Sullivan](#) (D-Burlington) penned Op-Eds calling for a Carbon Tax on Vermonters. This is a big deal because Yantachka is a member of the House Energy & Technology committee, and Sullivan is the vice-chair of the Natural Resources Committee. One or both of committees is where the fate of the Carbon Tax will likely be decided, and current chairs of these committees, Steve Carr (D-Brandon) and David Deen (D-Putney) respectively, are not running for re-election. This opens a potentially powerful door for one or both of the above-mentioned Carbon Tax warriors.

Climate Alarmists Wrong Again! Remember when climate alarmists warned that the impending heat death resulting from rising temperatures would start with “global browning?” This was described as the cooking of the planet’s fertile lands to the point where they become desert-like dust bowls leading to mass starvation. Well, add this to the list of alarmist predictions that were totally, 180 degrees wrong. Evidence now shows that increased CO2 levels have led not to “browning” but to global “greening.” Not a shocker given that CO2 is plant food. But, the alarmists are undeterred. Now the [New York Times](#) is raising the alarm that greening is bad. You’d think that the ability to grow more food on less land would excite environmental preservationists as well as those who care about the hungry, but, sadly, no. That wouldn’t fit the narrative.

Canada Carbon Tax Sinking. The premiers of Ontario, Saskatchewan, PEI, Manitoba and Newfoundland/Labrador are either opposed or backing far off from Prime Minister Trudeau’s proposal for a carbon tax. “Even some carbon-tax supporters are predicting the same. This week, Warren Kinsella, who once worked for the Chrétien Liberals (and who

describes himself as being ‘110 per cent’ in favour of a carbon tax) tweeted that with so many provinces bailing on it, ‘Trudeau’s dream of a carbon tax is dead, pretty much.’”
- Financial Post 7/19/18

Historical Vindication. The Vermont House passed what became Act 168 – carbon dioxide emission goals – 132-6, on May 3, 2006. One of the six No votes was that of Rep. Joyce Errecart of Shelburne. She explained her vote as follows: “I support aspirational goals for improving our environment. I vote no because the goals in this bill will be impossible to meet, and we don’t know what the consequences are of placing unattainable goals in statute.” Nine years later we were 16% above the 1990 carbon dioxide emission level in the statute, moving in the opposite direction from the goal of “50% below by 2028”.

US Leads in CO2 reductions. “When President Donald Trump announced he was pulling the United States out of the Paris Climate Accord in June 2017, left-wing environmentalists around the globe were apoplectic.... One year later, Earth is still here, and new evidence shows, alarmists’ claims to the contrary, the United States continues to lead the world in reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. According to a June report by BP measuring global CO2 emissions from the use of oil, gas, and coal, the United States reduced its CO2 emissions by 41.8 million tons, marking the third consecutive year Americans’ CO2 emissions fell. From 2006 to 2016, the United States slashed its CO2 emissions by about 12 percent, BP reports. (Sterling Burnette, CCW294, 8/3/18). Note: Thank you, natural gas fracking – so bitterly opposed by climate change warriors.

Communities Choosing Choice Over Forced Mergers. Some towns have sadly lost school choice as a result of Act 46 and its pressure on school districts to merge. However, some may be gaining it. The Caledonian Record reports that voters in Groton, Wells River and Ryegate voted 443 to 183 to close the Blue Mountain Union School and become a tuitioning district to prevent a Montpelier-forced merger that many believe will lead to the closing of the school anyway. Other communities, such as Ludlow, are considering similar measures, but also hoping to re-opening their schools as independents. This is good news for kids, families and property owners in these towns.

New VT Education Secretary on Choice. “School choice is an essential aspect of our education system in Vermont. In Manchester, for example, they wouldn’t build a public high school any time soon. It wouldn’t make sense to do that. And in many cases our independent school model is a little unique as a result of our history and rural geography. It’s a real viable way by which we educate our students.” – Secretary of Education Daniel French (VTDigger interview 8/19/18).

You Were Warned. Act 46 is in its final phase, and the state is now tasked with deciding what to do with those districts that have not already merged voluntarily. Then-acting Secretary of Education Heather Bouchey has recommended a total of [18 forced mergers](#) to the State Board of Education, which will have the final say.” (VTDigger 8/16/18)

Vermont #1 in Illegal Northern Border Crossings. Vermont leads all other U.S. states in illegal crossings along the Canada/U.S. border, U.S. Attorney Christina Nolan said

during an August 15 WCAX-TV interview. Illegal crossings are up 50% in the last year for the U.S. Border Patrol “Swanton sector,” which covers all of the Vermont border and parts of New York and New Hampshire. “This has got our attention,” U.S. Attorney Nolan said. “It’s a priority for our office.” - By Guy Page, [State House Headliners](#), [8/16/18](#)

Bathroom Humor. Several Vermont media outlets reported that the “gender neutral” bathroom mandate that became law on July 1 is being universally ignored by Vermont businesses. More interestingly, nobody in the public has complained. (Well, to be fair, there was one reported complaint.) What does this tell us? That this law, for all the hoopla and drama in the State House, was an unnecessary solution in search of a non-existent problem. It would be funny if this kind of lawmaking wasn’t so prevalent in Montpelier.

Dumb: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The Progressive superstar du jour recently visited the coffee shop where she used to work one last time before the place closes down. Why is it closing down? Owner Charles Milite [explained](#), “The rents are very high and now the minimum wage is going up and we have a huge number of employees.” The minimum wage increase Milite refers to is the increase from \$13.50 to \$15 an hour for New York City employers scheduled for December 31, 2018. Cortez is, of course, an outspoken proponent of a national \$15 minimum wage. We hope the irony of this is not lost on all the “friends” she visited one last time before they head off to the unemployment line.

Dumber: Elizabeth Warren. “Progressives have always been big on the notion that centralizing power in the hands of ‘experts’ in Washington can deliver big benefits at no cost. Here is how progressive apologist Matthew Yglesias put it in his August 15, 2018 piece in Vox: ‘Elizabeth Warren has a big idea that challenges how the Democratic Party thinks about solving the problem of inequality.... she’s introducing a bill Wednesday, the Accountable Capitalism Act, that would redistribute trillions of dollars from rich executives and shareholders to the middle class — without costing a dime.’ Right. Senator Warren’s plan wouldn’t cost a dime. It would cost \$13.5 trillion. It would also bankrupt every insurance company and pension plan in the U.S. And, while Warren’s “reform” would not completely wipe out your 401k, it would reduce the value of the common stocks in your account by 45%.... I estimate that the Warren plan would reduce the value of large U.S. companies by \$13.5 trillion (45% of their current market cap of about \$30 trillion). Ironically enough, my calculations are based upon the work of that darling of the progressives, Thomas Piketty.” - Louis Woodhill ([RealClearMarkets](#), [8/20/18](#))

Sanders Medicare for All Plan and Providers. “More generous health care insurance would be provided to everyone at the expense of health care providers,” [the Mercatus study found]. “Whether providers could sustain such losses and remain in operation, and how those who continue operations would adapt to such dramatic payment reductions, are critically important questions.” (AP 8/8/18)

Marijuana, Energy Hog. “In Colorado, half of all new electricity demand in greater Denver has come from legalized marijuana cultivation. Four percent of all Denver area

electricity goes to the marijuana industry, Colorado Public Radio reported this year. These industrial “grow” facilities and their lights, fans, heaters and air-conditioners consume a spectacular amount of energy. Some grows even emit CO2 on purpose. Propane-powered CO2 generators pump tons of the greenhouse gas into the greenhouse atmosphere. Plants love CO2. It makes them grow bigger and faster.” – Guy Page, State House Report, 8/3/18.

Good Advice. “If we as private citizens take care of today's little things--the nearby things--then national greatness will take care of itself. Forget about missionary work mandated from Washington: Build up your business. Pour yourself into your own children and those who live in your neighborhood. Give generously to your church and charities. Beautify your house and yard and village. Buy worthy, enlightening products. Read, think, and debate in the public square. And eschew distant, impersonal projects for improving mankind ginned up by utopians who love humanity so much they are too busy to introduce themselves to their next-door neighbor, and too weighted with great responsibilities to spend the time necessary to make their sons and daughters into honorable people.” – Karl Zinsmeister (TAE 11/97).

Real Vermont News. Bob Frenier has created a new alternative media outlet called Real Vermont News. The goal of these short (2-3 minutes), interview-style videos is to present a conservative perspective on multiple issues so Vermont voters can better understand how many conservatives think. So far, Frenier’s list of guests includes Rob Roper, Guy Page, Dick Tracy, Chris Bradley, and Michael Bielawski speaking on topics ranging from Carbon Taxes, to union power, to school choice and more. Check it out!

Book Movie of the Month

First Reformed

Directed by Paul Schrader

Killer Films, et al (2018)

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6053438/>

Directed by Martin Scorsese understudy Paul Schrader, *First Reformed* is the rare movie that has received rave reviews from Hollywood critics, while asking several important cultural, political, and moral questions. It is the story of a troubled pastor who seems able to recite the “right” answers by heart, but struggles to realize those answers in his own life.

Reverend Ernst Toller’s troubled past is highlighted by his military service, the death of his son in Iraq, and his divorce. While his job title is Reverend, the congregation that he pastors is minuscule, meaning that his real job is caretaker for the First Reformed Church, which is more of a nineteenth-century historical landmark than a place for worshippers to gather.

Toller’s story revolves around his relationship with a couple, Michael and Mary, whose marriage is in crisis. Michael believes mankind has ruined the Earth, and is willing to consider environmental terrorism as a way to protect Earth from humanity. Mary

shares many of Michael's principles "but not his despair" as she puts it, and places a higher value on human life, including that of her unborn baby. The couple forces Toller to reconsider his own personal sins, which he has spent years trying to forget.

Even in a largely secularized society like our own, the religious idea of atonement, which is making amends for wrongs committed, somehow manages to find its way to the surface often, curiously enough, in progressive circles. History and culture will attest that the human need for atonement is at the core of our nature. Over the course of 113 minutes, Toller begins to learn that if we attempt to atone for vast wrongs ourselves with the pretense of being all-knowing, those wrongs will lead us to trivialize the priceless value of human life.

Despite the heaviness of the movie, Schrader spins a thin thread of hope throughout. And the consideration of religion as a possibility for answering tough questions makes *First Reformed* stand out from its Hollywood peers that reiterate tired answers ad-nauseam. While the film may leave you feeling unsteady on your feet as you exit the theater, I'm willing to bet that it will give you a lot to think about in days ahead.

- Reviewed by David Flemming, policy analyst for the Ethan Allen Institute.

The Final Word

How to Lower Property Taxes?

1. My Vermont property tax bill...
 - a) ... went up this year.
 - b) ... went down this year.
 - c) ... stayed the same this year.
 - d) I don't pay Vermont property taxes.

2. My Vermont property tax bill is...
 - a) ... cripplingly high. I may have to move.
 - b) ... uncomfortably high.
 - c) ... manageable/fair.
 - d) ... low.
 - e) I don't pay Vermont property taxes.

3. What would be the best way to reduce public education costs in Vermont in order to lower property tax bills?
 - a) Set a maximum cap for per pupil spending (adjusting for grade levels).
 - b) Mandate higher pupil to staff ratios in all public schools.
 - c) Create one statewide school district with the legislature accountable for setting budgets.
 - d) Provide tuition vouchers to all pupils and let them choose among a variety of competing public and independent schools.
 - e) Other (please specify)

Take the Survey At...

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FVD5FDG>

August Survey Results: Top Issue.

What is the number one trend Vermont must reverse if we want to enjoy a prosperous future?

- High Taxes/Cost of living. 85% (34)
- Demographics/Population Decline. 2.5% (1)
- Global Warming/Climate Change. 5% (2)
- Rising Cost of Healthcare. 2.5% (1)
- Opioids/Addiction. 0% (0)
- Other 5% (2)