Top Story: Legislator Profiles Are Updated for 2019

The 2019 legislative session is over. Thank goodness! We witnessed some true craziness this year, for sure, with bills allowing non-citizens to vote, a ban on plastic bags and straws, changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People’s Day, a waiting period to purchase handguns, and a constitutional amendment ending slavery. (Apparently the memo from 1865 was not received!)

We also had some serious policy battles over the $15 minimum wage, Paid Family Leave, doubling the tax on heating fuels, a mandate to purchase health insurance, abortion, and more.

CLICK HERE to see how your legislators voted!

Beyond providing a picture of how your elected officials voted, each legislator’s page includes detailed contact information, including email addresses, links to social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter when available, and websites, as well email links to the editors of the local papers serving their districts.

These Profiles provide a true a “one stop” platform for you to learn about, interact with, and hold your legislator accountable for what they are doing in your name. Please put them to good use, and share them with your friends and neighbors.

This service is more important than ever because in 2019 the keepers of the official legislative website stopped publishing legislators’ local contact information, supplying only a legislative email and the generic phone number of the Sergeant at Arms office. This is not the way to encourage an engaged public!
Commentary:  
A New Front in the Endless Battle Against Climate Change  
*By John McClaughry*

The Long Range Transportation Plan of 1995 reaffirmed as the highest priority the maintenance and improvement of Vermont’s highways and bridges. Hardly anyone disagreed. But beginning in earnest in 2006, climate change activists have succeeded in progressively shifting the emphasis of transportation policy toward reducing CO2 emissions and defeating climate change.

Gasoline and diesel fueled-transportation contributes 43% of Vermont’s carbon dioxide emissions. This year’s Transportation bill announces this controlling policy: “This act includes the State’s fiscal year 2020 transportation investments intended to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions, reduce fossil fuel use, and save Vermont households money in furtherance of the goals of the Comprehensive Energy Plan, and to satisfy the Executive and Legislative Branches’ commitments to the Paris Agreement climate goals.”

The Paris Agreement established CO2 emission quotas for 195 countries, and obliged developed countries like the U.S. to collectively hand over $100 billion a year to persuade the others to pretend to comply. It was signed by President Obama in 2015 but
never sent to the Senate for ratification. President Trump bailed the U.S. out in 2017, and after four years only seven of those 195 countries are actually on track to comply. Under pressure from enviros, Gov. Scott announced in 2017 that Vermont will, in a gesture of climate solidarity, drive down our emissions to our pro-rated share of the U.S. contribution.

Most of the $286 million (plus Federal funds) in the FY2020 Transportation will of course continue to pay for highway and bridge maintenance, but a trip through the Transportation bill shows how the emphasis has shifted.

The climate activists urgently believe that Vermonters must be lured or taxed out of their gasoline and diesel vehicles in favor of electric cars. Thus the bill offers more Plug-in Electric Vehicle (PEV) purchase and lease incentives “to help all Vermonters to benefit from electric driving, including [of course!] Vermont’s most vulnerable.” If your family has under 160% of the 5-year average Median Household Income, you can qualify for subsidies to allow you to buy a PEV that costs up to $40,000.

After three studies, the legislature has still not figured out how to make PEV drivers pay anything at all for using the public highways. The present bill does allow state agencies to set fees for the electricity downloaded from state charging stations, which is an improvement over the present practice of just giving it away.

Of special interest is the 17% increase in public transportation spending, which includes $1.884 million (!) to pay for two (!) electric transit buses for the Burlington area, and $480,000 for two electric shuttle buses for the Montpelier area. Other new “low-carbon spending initiatives” include 77 bike/pedestrian projects and increasing the number of electric vehicles in the 734-vehicle state fleet from 54 to 367.

The bill mandates a study of a “feebate” program, whereby persons who buy larger and safer but less fuel-efficient cars are charged a “fee” (aka “tax”), and the proceeds are rebated to the purchasers of smaller, less safe, more fuel efficient, and more electrified vehicles.

Then there’s the eternal passenger rail fantasy. The bill assigns $5.2 million to upgrade the Rutland to Burlington track for future passenger traffic. The memory of Gov. Dean’s $28 million Champlain Flyer boondoggle seems to have vanished beyond recovery, along with a million dollars worth of improvements pocketed by the owner of the Burlington train station.

Particularly interesting is the requirement of a study to support a seven mile (!) Barre to Montpelier commuter rail project. This was urged upon legislators by wind and solar mogul David Blittersdorf, who bought five elderly self-propelled Budd cars and wants to convert them from museum pieces into income-producing assets.

Finally, the bill endorses the Scott Administration’s participation in the group designing the Transportation Climate Initiative. This will be a multistate cap-and-trade plan regulating and taxing the transportation use of fossil fuels. Each state would use the windfall proceeds to pay for “low-carbon and more resilient transportation infrastructure.”

When Democratic candidate Sue Minter proposed a TCI in a 2016 campaign debate, Scott immediately and correctly labelled it a carbon tax. Why he is actively supporting TCI development now remains a mystery.

There are some useful provisions in the bill, notably excusing 16-year-old vehicles from computerized inspection failures that have nothing to do with safe operation. But overall the bill illustrates how defeating climate change and suppressing CO2 emissions have come to overshadow the basic function of AoT – to preserve and
maintain a network of highways to meet the transportation needs of the Vermonter who are paying the bills.

- John McClaughry is vice president of the Ethan Allen Institute

Commentary:  
The Authoritarian/Totalitarian Plastic Bag Ban  

By Rob Roper

Activists and politicians around Vermont are preening with pride about having passed the nation’s broadest ban on plastic bags and plastic products, with a promise (in the form of a study committee) of more to come. As citizens of an ostensibly free society founded upon the principle of limited government, this is not something we should be pleased about. This bag ban is a truly authoritarian/totalitarian policy.

Given that in the current national political atmosphere words like authoritarian, dictatorial, police state, etc. are being thrown about quite a bit, it is probably important to revisit what those terms really mean:

au·thor·i·tar·i·an. Adjective. 1. Favoring or enforcing strict obedience to authority, especially that of the government, at the expense of personal freedom.

to·tal·i·tar·i·an. Adjective. 1. Relating to a system of government that is centralized and dictatorial and requires complete subservience to the state.

With the bag ban, for example, rather than allow merchants the personal freedom to decide whether or not to provide plastic bags, and customers the freedom to choose what kind of bag they would prefer, the state has usurped and centralized the “authority” to dictate that decision to us, and we are to strictly obey—or the police will force us to. Hence, it is an authoritarian policy.

I also call it totalitarian because in a totalitarian system the totality of decision making for the citizenry rests with the state. If we citizens are not at liberty to decide for ourselves something as minute as “paper or plastic”, what decisions can’t the state make for us? This is not limited government; it’s limitless government. “Total” control.

Sadly, way too many policies becoming law these days are authoritarian, robbing us of individual liberty and requiring obedience to centralized, government decision making. The state has assumed the authority to decide whether or not we must purchase health insurance, what kind, and from whom; where our children must go to school and what they will learn there; everything down to what kind of light bulbs we can use and, increasingly, what kind of electricity we must buy to power those bulbs. The list goes on and on as this seems to be the “progressive” vision.

But this is not, as the chant says, “what democracy looks like.” This is what an authoritarian police state looks like. A society based on individual liberty, as our is (or was), leaves the people free to make decisions for and amongst themselves. The legitimate role of government in such a society is to ensure that private decisions are made “free of force and fraud.” In other words, government is supposed to protect
citizens from other citizens who want to force us to do things against our consent. It is certainly not supposed to be the entity doing the forcing!

Government is always, by its very nature, an agent of force. It has what has been aptly described as a “monopoly on legitimate violence.” What makes ours a uniquely free, democratic, and non-authoritarian society is that our Constitution, when followed, limits to a vast degree where and when that violence can be employed. Hence the oft-repeated language in our Bill of Rights like “Congress shall make no law,” rights “shall not be infringed,” government can’t take action “without the consent of the owner”. With respect to most aspects of our daily lives, we do not have to obey government so long as we deal on a peaceful, mutually consensual basis with our fellow citizens.

And this is a good thing. When outcomes are by necessity determined as a result of mutual consent it fosters understanding, cooperation, innovation, diversity, shared value and values. This dynamic is what has made the United States the most prosperous and diverse nation in human history.

On the other hand, when outcomes are the result of one side extracting its agenda from another through force, it leads to anger, resentment, and reactive hostility. We can see this today as government force injects itself into more and more aspects of our lives (such as plastic bags), the more anger, resentment and hostility grows. And, honestly, who wants to live in a society where everything is decided by force or the threat of force besides a narcissistic psychopath who gets a thrill out of controlling other people and bossing them around?

When people advocate for government action these days, they are too often saying, I cannot get my fellow citizens to consensually do what I want them to do, so use the government’s monopoly on violence to force them to do as I say. The impulse to resort to force is unfortunately a common human reaction to not getting one’s way. But giving into that impulse is to embrace authoritarianism at the expense of liberty. This is exactly what our government is supposed to guard against, not foster.

- Rob Roper is president of the Ethan Allen Institute. He lives in Stowe

http://ethanallen.org/commentary-the-authoritarian-totalitarian-plastic-bag-ban/

Guest Commentary: What Happened to Rule of Law?

By John Klar

Not content with disrupting the business of the Vermont House, climate change protesters popped up again to disrupt another much-loved public event. On June 8, Brattleboro hosted its annual celebration of local agriculture, the “Strolling of the Heifers” Parade. A small group of climate change protesters obstructed the Parade for about fifteen minutes, refusing to disperse. Two of the youngsters were carried off the roadway on backboards by authorities - but no arrests were made.

The public event’s co-announcer, Progressive Lt. Governor and climate warrior David Zuckerman, praised the protestors from the reviewing stand for their civil disobedience. They were allowed to dominate the event and were not charged with any crime (their banner was returned to them). Said a local police officer: “What they did could have gotten them arrested…. but it was short and nonviolent.”
Had the protesters been conservative youth wearing MAGA hats in support of veterans, would the crowd, the police, and the Lt. Governor have been so accepting? Would those protesters be permitted fifteen minutes of “short and nonviolent” disruption?

Consider the implications: the police and a high government official placed their firm imprimatur on one side of a political issue. As the protesters halted the Parade, the announcers praised them for their “great point,” and then announced over the microphone the protesters’ demand that towns implement climate change policies.

Zuckerman went much further, beginning: “I think that’s something that towns can do locally, and the state can do more as well and obviously even nationally and internationally. Thank you to the folks for bringing attention… You know it’s great, honestly, seeing young people getting involved as well you know I think a lot of us would like to see more of every age group get involved in our community and our political process making our voices heard, so kudos to young folks for getting involved as well.”

One (invariably liberal) media report observed that Zuckerman said that “Activism is a good thing,”... But after five minutes of watching protesters writhe on the pavement while a lineup of more than forty community groups and thousands of spectators sat stymied in the hot sun, the Progressive Party politician turned his microphone into a negotiating tool.

Another media report described how the Lt. Governor “tried to convince the protesters to move since they were holding up the parade....,” and quoted a lead protester saying that “the climate change activists thought the heifer parade was too much of an opportunity to pass up.” Since Zuckerman is a strong proponent in Vermont of a slew of climate initiatives, including a carbon tax, he enhanced and magnified that opportunity for the protestors, endorsed their message, and did nothing to revive the parade.

Parade organizer Orly Munzing stated: "It's not respectful of our farmers…. to hold things up - not just for the people and animals in the parade, but many of the people and young children on the sidewalk, waiting in the hot sun.” But the media and liberals applauded how reasonably Zuckerman handled it -- but he didn’t handle anything at all. Why won’t the protestors be back next year to disrupt the parade again?

Zuckerman has been in government for many years. His website is “Vision With Vermont Values,” but he has yet to discover the value of maintaining civil order. Ironically, when the parade resumed a banner soon appeared reading “Civil Rights For All,” followed by a voice: “Standing up for the climate… is critically important.”

The concept of the rule of law eludes the practitioners of modern liberalism, many of whom actually embrace the belief (“critical theory”) that free speech and other protections must be removed in order for power to be transferred from dominant to powerless groups.

Today in Vermont, the media is all too often an unquestioning enthusiast for liberal propaganda. In lieu of personal responsibility, they embrace collective rights, and turn a blind eye to suppression of the rights of those with whom they disagree. (After all, they argue, we must save the climate (whatever that means), so those who disagree be silenced.)

In Vermont, as in many parts of our nation today, liberals seize upon “freedom of speech” to disrupt public events, and deny conservatives any right to offer contrary views. Liberal teenagers display Black Lives Matter flags at numerous public schools; conservatives display nothing at any schools. At times, police refuse to protect conservatives, and/or arrest liberals who openly and deliberately defy the law.
This year’s Strolling of the Heifers Parade again showed the face of disfigured liberalism, endorsed by Vermont’s Progressive Lt. Governor. With this welcome from state and local officialdom, we can expect to see the ranks of the climate protestors grow at next year’s event.

- John Klar is an attorney and pastor who lives in Brookfield.


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**Events**

**September 14. (NOTE NEW DATE/LOCATION)** The first annual "Liberty Fest" will take place from 10am - 4pm, at the Otter Creek Fun Center (1800 US Rt. 7, Danby, 20 miles south of Rutland.) Free and open to the public. There will be guest speakers from across the state and space for different organizations and groups to have a table and share their efforts and info. Plenty of food and beverage will be available as well. EAI president Rob Roper will be a featured speaker. For more information, contact dave@blackpowder.farm.

**Liberty Camp, 2019.** We are getting an early start recruiting 6th to 8th graders for summer Liberty Camp this year. Our tentative places and dates so far are St. Albans, July 23-25. If you are interested, please email lkirker@myfairpoint.net for more information. *Currently Full! Contact Linda if you would like to be put on the waiting list.*

To Schedule an EAI presentation in your community, please email rob@ethanallen.org.

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**News & Views**

**Public Education Spending Continues Out of Control.** “Just to summarize, actual K-12 education expenditures increased by $96 million between fiscal year 2016 and 2018 and are budgeted to increase a further $162 million by fiscal year 2020.” For a system that continues to lose students. -- The Informed Vermonter, 6/21/19

**The Real Reason Housing Costs Continue Out of Control.** “The rules and regulations for building or remodeling are onerous. And being a landlord is taking a risk. Laws are tilted towards tenants. Nobody’s jumping up saying let’s make it more affordable to build. Nobody wants to speed the eviction process. Nobody wants to eliminate ridiculous permitting. Consequently, yup it’s expensive to rent and it will remain expensive.” – Dave Bellini, President VSEU, VT Digger, 6/23/19

**Oh, What a Tangled Grid We Weave.** Between 2014-2018, the cost of wholesale electricity purchases from generating plants dropped by 33%. Good news, right? Thank
you, ultra-cheap hydro fracked natural gas. But that’s not the whole story. The work of transmitting that power cost consumers $2.2 billion (up 20%). Grid operators cite long-delayed improvements to enhance safety and reliability. It gets worse. Closure of plants like Vermont Yankee and the opening of new “intermittent” renewable power plants force regional grid operators to pay through the nose for “capacity charges.” In effect, consumers must pay power companies to keep generation available for emergency use. Like any convenience store product, capacity power is often unhealthy and always expensive. New England consumers paid $2.6 billion more in capacity charges between 2014 and 2018. Utilities and state governments add on operating, tax and energy efficiency costs to that 9.5 cent/kilowatt-hour wholesale power price. Investment of those energy efficiency fees has driven peak power cost down. Still, the average Vermont consumer power rate is about 17 cents per kilowatt hour, compared to about 11 cents nationwide. – Statehouse Headliners, 6/20/19

**Bernie Warns of WWIII.** “Today, America and the world are once again moving towards authoritarianism — and the same right-wing forces of oligarchy, corporatism, nationalism, racism and xenophobia are on the march, pushing us to make the apocalyptically wrong choice that Europe made in the last century,” (GWU address, 6/12/19)

**Bernie’s 99% Wealth Tax.** The Vermont Affairs interviewer asked Mayor Sanders, "How does a modern socialist movement bring about an equitable distribution of wealth, to use the phrase that scares a lot of people?" Sanders: “It mostly scares people who have the wealth. Well, it should scare them. But right now, I'm scared by the fact that I'm not sure how we're going to protect low income people from living out on the streets. That's very scary. That’s more scary to me than worrying about somebody who has stashed away a few hundred million in the bank, and who may only be able to keep a few million. I know he's very scared about that. I'm not so worried." (Vermont Affairs, Summer 1986).

**New York Fights Climate Change!** A new NY law mandates reducing the state’s CO2 emissions to 85% below 1990 levels by 2050. The emissions are already 8% below 1990 levels, so the state needs to cut a further 77%. A 77% drop from New York state’s emissions profile would mean cutting another 168 million metric tons of greenhouse gases, which comes out to roughly 0.3 percent of global emissions. “Nothing New York does on its own will have any measurable impact on world climate,” [former Vermont DPS energy planner Dr. Jon] Lesser said. “Nor, if this bill is signed into law, will developing nations suddenly say ‘Gee, New York passed a climate law. Let’s wreck our economies, too, to save the planet.’” (Daily Caller 6/22/19)

**On Democratic Socialism.** “The entire socialist system is built on taking property from those who legally own it so that others who want it can have the property – even if they’ve done nothing to earn it. Socialism is inherently tyrannical. It is Big Government on steroids – able to take away rights as well as extend them.” – Justin Haskins (Fox News 6/13/19)

**Carbon Tax Climate Fail.** “For example, a carbon tax steep enough to eliminate all U.S. CO2 emissions would avert only 0.034ºC-0.062ºC of global warming by 2050."[31]
Those potential impacts are smaller than the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s 0.08°C margin of error for estimating changes in inter-annual global temperature.” (CEI, May 2019)

**Wise Words from an Old Friend!** “Really sad how ill-served the kids [at Oberlin College] were at school, and how awful the Gibson family was treated by ‘social justice warriors.’ It's made me think about how easy it is to think you're on the right side of an issue when you're on the wrong side of history. My guess is none of those students or administrators woke up one day and decided, ‘Hey, I want to be like the people who ran the Salem witch trials. That's my life aspiration.’ Yet, they ended on that side of history because of being consumed by a wrongheaded zealotry.” -- Libby Sternberg ran Vermonters for School Choice for many years. She is now an author living in Pennsylvania.

**Good on Florida!** The June edition of Health Care News reports that health care consumers in Florida could soon be entering a new era of choice and competition, as the state legislature has passed a bill eliminating much of the state’s certificate of need (CON) laws. “Rolling back Florida’s CON laws is a tremendous accomplishment for the Florida legislature. CON laws are an outdated mechanism which far too often devolve into crony capitalism and indulge certain providers with special treatment over the good of the market,” said Matthew Glans, senior policy analyst with The Heartland Institute. Vermont, just to note, has more of these outdated, crony capitalist mechanisms than any other state in the Union.

**The Perils of Social Justice Warriorism.** “Our middle-class monitors must relearn the lessons from the past: working class folk are the salt of the earth. They deserve more respect than they currently get. Trash their identity, and they will destroy your identity politics.” -- Dr. Niall McCrae, author and senior lecturer in mental health at King’s College London, *Human Events* 6/16/19

**Justice Thomas on Liberty.** “Since well before 1787, liberty has been understood as freedom from government action, not entitlement to government benefits. … the majority … rejects the idea — captured in the Declaration of Independence — that human dignity is innate and suggests instead that it comes from the Government.” Justice Clarence Thomas, Dissenting in Obergefell v Hodges, 2015.

**Justice Thomas on Racism.** “People who will get very upset if someone said all blacks look alike are really comfortable saying all blacks ought to think alike.” Justice Clarence Thomas.

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**Book of the Month**

**Pandora’s Lab**  
*Seven Stories of Science Gone Wrong*  
by Paul A. Offit, MD  
National Geographic, 2017 (288 pages)
Paul Offit’s “Pandora’s Lab” is a fascinating quick read, strongly recommended for anyone dealing with policy-making around or based on “science.” As the subtitle says, the book chronicles the history, cultural factors, economics and psychology behind seven instances where the application of science, or the absence of rigorous science, led to some really horrible conclusions.

Examples of strong scientific discoveries with dire results include harnessing the pain-relieving qualities of the opium poppy and the ability to create synthetic nitrogen. In the former case, Dr. Offit details the history of how well-meaning scientists kept chasing the idea that they could find a way to maintain the pain-relief but lose the addictive qualities of the product. The path led from opium to morphine to heroin to oxycontin – each one promising at the time of its discovery to have solved the problem only to have actually made the problem worse.

With synthetic nitrogen, Offit illustrates a double edged sword. The discovery of how capture nitrogen from the air, used to make synthetic fertilizer, has allowed us to feed (and save from horrible death by starvation) billions of people on the planet. The same nitrogen, however, can be used to create powerful explosives, and the German scientists who discovered this process used it to both feed and arm the Nazi war effort, murdering tens of millions in the process. Whether or not the long term impact of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer ends up destroying our water supply (which would be a very bad development for mankind) remains to be seen.

The discovery of genes and genetics led to the eugenics movement of the early to mid 20th century in which scientists (and politicians touting scientists) used their newfound knowledge in an attempt to engineer a more perfect human species, culling the “human weeds” from the garden of humanity. In the United States this led to the forced sterilization of undesirable people and served as a scientific justification for racism. Of course, this led to the ultimate eugenics experiment in Nazi Germany with Hitler’s “Final Solution.”

Examples of people embracing pseudo-science, the desire for a quick fix overcoming sound science, include the mega vitamin craze of the 1980’s and, the really creepy three-decade-long fascination with lobotomies as a cure-all for mental disorders, often performed with an ice pick and a hammer.

On the other side of that hysterical coin, Offit also offers examples of when science has been abused to unnecessarily ban products with disastrous results. The most glaring example of this was the banning of DDT, the insecticide unfairly and unscientifically demonized in “Silent Spring”, which led to millions of people around the world, mostly children, dying unnecessarily of malaria. Another example is the banning of bisphenol (BPA) an industrial chemical used to make certain plastics. Despite overwhelming data showing the product to be harmless at the low levels of exposure experienced when used in plastics, political hysteria created a “zero tolerance” attitude toward the product – an attitude Offit warns against.

The book concludes with several warnings for science and policies under consideration today, such as e-cigarettes (the data shows they are safer that tobacco cigarettes and are not a gateway product to smoking), GMO’s (again, the data shows overwhelmingly that they are safe), overuse of cancer screening, and some promised quick fix cures for autism that are as frightening and damaging as ice pick lobotomies.

Many of the topics covered in this book are or have been recently the subjects of legislation in the Vermont State House.
The Final Word

July Survey: 2019 Representative Satisfaction
Did your elected representative(s) vote the way you liked during the 2019 legislative session?

- Yes, always.
- Yes, sometimes.
- About 50/50
- No, seldom.
- No, never.

CLICK HERE to take the survey.

June Survey Results: 24 hour Waiting Period for Handgun Purchase
Should Gov. Scott veto the bill requiring a 24 hour waiting period to purchase a handgun in Vermont?

- Yes. 85.42% (41)
- No. 14.58% (7)