

Today in our state we're experiencing something similar. On the one hand Vermont racks up the superlatives - Healthiest State, Best State to Raise a Family, Safest State, and on and on. The people who inhabit this Vermont are very well-educated, enjoy the outdoors, soak in the great culture our state offers, eat the wonderful food, travel, have skills that are valued in the workforce.

But then there's the Other Vermont.

The Other Vermont is inhabited by people experiencing a very different kind of life. In this Other Vermont, global trade has forced the shutdown of longstanding factories that used to guarantee a well-paying job for someone with just a high school diploma. This is especially true in rural areas.

The Other Vermont has kids growing up in families racked with drug or alcohol or mental health problems or some combination of the three. In the Other Vermont people receive small paychecks, have few options for healthy living, can't take their kids anywhere for enrichment.

The Other Vermont is filled with people who have been at best holding the line, but more likely losing economic ground in a decade that has benefitted some so greatly.

So above everything else we work on, we must, in every policy area, endeavor to create just ONE VERMONT, a place where the dumb luck of who you've been born to doesn't on the one hand confer a near guarantee of a great, long life to some kids, and on the other hand condemn other kids to lives of struggle, poor health, and poverty.

Our work will also take us into nearly every important area of public policy.

How to go about cleaning up our lakes and waterways, and how to pay for that work. How to move forward to build a true system of substance abuse treatment no matter which county you live in.

How to ensure we have the physical and human infrastructure in place to address the serious mental health needs throughout the state, and to make sure that system doesn't ride the backs of the front line workers who do the most heart-wrenching work for near-poverty pay.

How to ensure kids aren't hungry at school, making learning a second order issue for them. How to ease the financial burden faced by so many Vermont college students, including a few of my own students who I see hear today.

How to create a coherent rural economic development strategy. And to continue the visionary work of juvenile justice reform, work with our law enforcement partners to address issues of implicit bias, continue to support one of the finest public education systems in the country at a time of declining student counts, work to restrain health care spending, and so much more.

This is not intended to sound like a laundry list or a menu to choose from. It's just the reality of what's ahead.

Oh, and all this work must be done while waiting to learn just what the Trump Administration, possibly the least able to be predicted in U.S. history, has in mind on nearly every policy critical to Vermont, especially health care, and when what little we have heard could be just plain disastrous to our budget.

Part Two - The Team.

Everything I just said seems a bit overwhelming when you put it all together. Addressing poverty and income inequality and everything else I listed isn't for the feint of heart, or the mere dabbler.

But what keeps the bounce in my step despite the challenges we face is The Team we have here today.

A quick summary is useful to showcase what the 30 senators Vermonters sent here bring to the committee tables and the desks in the chamber.

In this Senate, service roots run deep: We have five former school board members, four selectboard members, two city councilors, one of whom, the senior senator from Rutland, is a double dipper having also served as a school board member although not in the same municipality. We also have one mayor, in our senior senator from Washington.

We have three former planning commissioners, two DRB members, several town moderators, one parks commissioner, and at least one person who will admit to being the former collector of delinquent taxes (that'd be the junior senator from Orleans).

We include a former Sergeant of Arms of this State House in our junior Senator from Washington, and a veteran of the Vietnam War, the Senator from Orange who of course deserves our thanks.

In this Senate, Our professional backgrounds are representative of the communities from which we traveled today: We include a registered nurse, the senior senator from Addison, two professors, one an oft-published novelist (that'd be the Senator from

Chittenden Senator Baruth), and one a published scientist, another senator from Chittenden Senator Lyons.

We have three k through 12 educators, two who work in higher ed, and at least four others who have taught some collegiate courses.

We've got the owner of a trucking company and a construction company and a communications company, the last of these the junior senator from Addison.

We include Senators who've been paid to play music (here I include the senior Senator from Windsor as well as the junior Senator from Caledonia), a senator who's been paid to sling drinks (a new Senator from Chittenden Senator Pearson) and a senator who's been paid to teach rock climbing (a little known fact about the junior Senator from Windham).

We include three lawyers, one of whom clerked for it, the Senator from Rutland Senator Flory, a realtor, a housing developer, two Senators who dedicated their adult lives to helping kids (both the senior senator from Bennington and the Senator from Windsor, Senator Nitka).

We have two radio hosts (including the Senator from

Washington Senator Pollina). We include a movie theater operator, a theater *producer* in our new junior senator from Windsor, a grocer, a non-profit administrator from the perhaps unfortunate birthplace for a politician of Thief River Falls (that'd be, surprisingly of course, the senior Senator from Windham).

We include a former Secretary of Human Services, a former Tax Commissioner, an ordained minister in the Senator from Chittenden Senator Ingram, a maple syrup producer, the junior senator from Franklin, and no fewer than four in our ranks who've worked for a statewide elected official here in Vermont, including most recently our senior Senator from Franklin.

In this Senate we've served on so many community boards it speaks the loudest possible volumes about our capacity to endure long meetings but more importantly of our love for the communities in which we live.

They include, and this is just a tiny representation, board service on: for one senator, both the Elks Club #2155 and VT Trucks and Bus Association, a distinction possibly only ever held by the senior senator from Orleans, the VT chapter of the national ice hockey association of America (our junior Senator from Rutland, who I should add was President),

Holy Cross Senior Housing, the senator from Grand Isle, the Bennington Museum, the junior senator from bennington, not to mention countless soup kitchens, church vestries, historical societies, environmental organizations,

and we've served as coaches of sports ranging from hockey, to football, to soccer to baseball, including the Senator from Chittenden Senator Sirotkin.

And lastly, we include at least four Senators who grew up on family farms, including the Senator from Lamoille and the senior senator from Caledonia, and at least two who continue to run farm operations.

I could not be more excited that this is the team of 30 selected by Vermonters to take on the Work Ahead.

Part Three - Some Inspiration To Guide the Way

Those of you who know me well know that I cherish our place in the long narrative of Vermont's history, and I hope as we take on the difficult work ahead, we draw inspiration from elected officials who have come before us, all of whom served at the local level in Vermont.

And that we think about our collective efforts as part

of the same special Vermont experience they've helped define.

A small number of our predecessors speak to this unique Vermont heritage.

Think of George Aiken who was one of just five US Senators who spoke out against the personal destruction of a man named Leland Olds of the Federal Power Commission who was publicly ruined for doing his job, regulating the big power interests of the 1930s and 40s

Think of Ralph Flanders, former Senator and granddad to my friend and neighbor, who introduced the US Senate resolution to censure Joseph McCarthy.

Think of Consuelo Bailey and Madeline Kunin who broke barriers for women in elected office and public life.

Think of Jim Jeffords risked the disapproval of longtime colleagues by following his conscience and literally, in one difficult act, changing the balance of power in the COngress.

Think of Former Governor Dean who prominently questioned a foreign war in his 2004 presidential run,

and our state's junior US Senator Bernie Sanders who appealed to millions of citizens throughout the US during his presidential campaign, bringing the exact same message to the country that's he's shared with us here in Vermont.

Finally, let's keep in mind our great friend and colleague Senator Bill Doyle. For 48 years he was not just a good Senator, he was a great person. He was a mentor to me like he's been to so many of you, and to so many young people in Vermont. And it's so great that Bill is here today. Thanks Bill!

Though these Vermonters had different parties, different ideology, different styles, they shared some basic traits we would do well to legislate by - a sense of fairness, a desire to give every person a chance at a good life, and ultimately, and I think this is one true area of Vermont exceptionalism, plain decency when it comes to the treatment of our fellow man and woman.

Part Four - The Sponge

When I was first elected to this Senate in 2008, my friends gathered for a celebration at the Old Three Needs bar on College Street in Burlington.

I remember standing on the bar with a porter in my

hand, telling my friends that I considered myself little more than a vehicle to bring their insights, experience, and wisdom to the Senate. It sounded corny then as it does now to say it. But I meant it.

I'm not the most self-reflective person, but all my life I've been a sponge.

That's what you've got as pro tem now, a sponge. Standing up here right now, I can say sincerely that I am little more than what I've learned from each of you these last eight years.

I've absorbed your stories, your work experience, your humor, your understanding, your caring, and even your sandwiches. If I'm a monster, you created me!

And while some of you are sick of my soccer metaphors, I think you know I leave it all on the field here in the Senate, and will continue to do so in this new role on your behalf.

My blood sweat and tears fill this building, but they're dwarfed by the enjoyment of what we've accomplished together over the years.

Part Five - The Disclaimer

I have a disclaimer to make. I could not be here as a Senator, I could not be here as your pro tem, without the support of Paula for the last 14 years.

Our relationship is complicated by our respective obsessions with journalistic integrity and legislative confidence keeping. It can be frustrating to live by this firewall, yet I'll never apologize for having a partner who is one of the most savvy and visionary businesswomen not just in Vermont, but in national publishing.

And a special thanks to my parents, who are here and who must be dumbfounded that the bearded, bookwormy, jock they know stands up here today in this most honored position.

Thanks for your patience. Now let's continue to reflect the best in honorable, respectful, and forward thinking public service. Thank you so much. Let's get to it.