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Notes from editor (not for publication):

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

The people are always right

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

‘The real story of this country is about what happens
when people at the bottom — in towns, schools, newsrooms, and
neighborhoods — decide to act. We will not answer
authoritarianism by mirroring it. We answer it by standing firm in
what’s right.’

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

I SERVED ON our local school boards for over 20 years,
and the best advice I received during that service was from our
chair: “The people are always right.”

11 Especially when we were divided — that reminder
12 helped us find consensus.

13 We could always agree that the people will tell us what
14 to do.

15 And it's true.

16 And when the people get it wrong, they figure it out and
17 change course.

18 That is the engine of a free republic — power from the
19 bottom up, not the top down.

20 Our founders understood this.

21 They wrote the Declaration of Independence as both a
22 warning and a promise.

23 They declared what was then the most radical idea of its
24 time: "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just
25 powers from the consent of the governed."

26 Consent. Not force. Not fear.

27 That principle — government by consent — is
28 foundational to our democracy.

29 And today, that foundation is shifting beneath us.

30 * * *

31 AUTHORITARIANISM IS on the rise in America, and it has
32 also crossed into fascist actions and rhetoric in our politics.

33 Fascism is a system that concentrates power in one
34 leader or party, punishes dissent, manipulates truth, and divides
35 people through fear and lies — replacing the rule of law with the
36 rule of one man.

37 I am anti-fascism — because being anti-fascism means
38 being for democracy, for the rule of law, for human rights for all,
39 and for our communities.

40 In America we are seeing actions that concentrate power
41 and erode the rule of law — the hallmarks of authoritarian and
42 fascist regimes throughout history:

43 • Elections are being undermined, the Constitution
44 dismissed, and people are dehumanized as "vermin" or "not
45 human."

46 • The free press is attacked, opponents targeted for
47 prosecution, and retribution through the justice system being
48 attempted.

49 • Those who attacked the U.S. Capitol have been
50 pardoned.

51 • Armed troops are being sent into American cities over
52 the objections of elected governors.

53 • The military is being used against civilians, universities
54 are punished for speech, and wartime powers are invoked to
55 deport people labeled as enemies.

56 • Mass firings of civil servants are ordered in defiance of
57 court rulings, with claims that “the laws don’t apply,” using crisis
58 as cover to consolidate power.

59 • Government resources — airports, agency websites,
60 federal buildings — are used to broadcast partisan propaganda
61 while the offices that enforce ethics laws are shut down.

62 • Qualified and professional military officers are purged,
63 commanders replaced with loyalists, and personal allegiance
64 demanded in place of constitutional obedience.

65 • Military strikes and covert operations are launched
66 without congressional approval, pushing the nation toward war
67 while evidence is withheld and public debate is silenced.

68 Those are not conservative or liberal acts.
69 They are authoritarian.
70 And when they come wrapped in nationalism,
71 dehumanization, and contempt for the rule of law, they are the
72 acts of fascism.

73 Our country is in real trouble.
74 The laws, traditions, and norms that have kept power
75 limited and accountable are being tested — and in some cases
76 ignored.

77 * * *

78 BUT THE STORY of this country has never been just about
79 what happens at the top.

80 The real story of this country is about what happens
81 when people at the bottom — in towns, schools, newsrooms, and
82 neighborhoods — decide to act.

83 We will not answer authoritarianism by mirroring it.

84 We answer it by standing firm in what's right.

85 Courage isn't comfortable. It's choosing to act even when
86 it's hard.

87 Top-down power is what tyrants have tried over and over
88 — it never lasts.

89 I'm an independent, unaffiliated, and I'm regularly
90 reminded that power is kept from me because of my lack of
91 affiliation with a party.

92 But my husband also regularly reminds me: top-down
93 power can't last — it's fleeting. The power to govern always
94 comes from the bottom up.

95 What does bottom-up power look like?

96 It looks like voters who organize and show up.

97 Neighbors who refuse to turn against each other.

98 Reporters who ask hard questions.

99 Volunteers at the food shelf and at the fire house.

100 Clerks at town meeting.

101 Community event organizers.

102 Parents showing up for school concerts and board
103 meetings.

104 Local businesses pitching in when a family loses their
105 home.

106 Bottom-up power looks like you — my friends and my
107 neighbors.

108 * * *

109 HERE'S WHAT WE NEED to do, starting right now:

110 • Speak up. When rights are trampled or laws are
111 broken, say so — calmly, clearly, again and again.

112 • Back the truth. Support your local press. Subscribe,
113 share, defend their independence.

114 • Defend local institutions. School boards, Selectboards,
115 libraries, courts — these are where we practice self-government.
116 Show up. Serve.

117 • Do not let your communities unravel. Disagreement is
118 not an emergency. Division is a tactic. Refuse it.

119 • Double down on service. Governing, caretaking, and
120 celebrating are all public service. Coach, volunteer, bring a dish
121 to the potluck.

122 • Celebrate. Remember what we're fighting for. As Anne
123 Lamott says, "Joy is the best revenge." Joy disarms hate. It breaks
124 fear's grip. It keeps communities together.

125 In Vermont, we know how to do this.

126 We fix the culvert, shovel the neighbor's walkway, show
127 up at the potluck fundraiser and also at the budget hearing.

128 We argue — and then we pass the plate and pass the
129 budget.

130 That is not small. That is the foundation.

131 * * *

132 THE DECLARATION also says: "Whenever any Form of
133 Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of
134 the People to alter or abolish it."

135 That was a call to revolution then.

136 Today, it's a call to responsibility — to us and to our
137 fellow citizens to change what's destructive through lawful and
138 nonviolent means: by voting, organizing, testifying, litigating, and
139 telling the truth in public.

140 I expect courage from our leaders — and from myself.

141 If you don't hear courage from your elected leader, say
142 so. In our democracy — our republic — silence feeds fear. Your
143 voice is the answer to that fear.

144 This is a very serious time, so we are going to need to
145 practice serious hope — the kind that builds things, not just
146 believes.

147 Because in America — and especially in Vermont — the
148 people are always right.

149 Hold fast to one another, my friends. Choose courage
150 over comfort. Choose service over cynicism. Choose joy over
151 fear. That is how free people behave.

152 And that is how we keep the promise in the Declaration
153 — and this is how we will keep this Republic.

154 Speak up.

155 Say the truth.

156 Defend our institutions.

157 Serve.

158 Celebrate.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

159 **LAURA SIBILIA** delivered these remarks at the No Kings
160 2.0 event in Wilmington on Oct. 18. Sibilialia, an independent,
161 represents the Windham-2 district (Dover, Jamaica, Somerset,
162 Stratton, and Wardsboro) in the Vermont House of
163 Representatives.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

167

###END LOGLINE###