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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Lawmakers will need to compromise, says county's only  
2 nonpartisan state rep

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3 Sibilia eyes human rights, education, and energy as top  
4 priorities for the new legislative session

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5 TEXT BODY:

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6 "The reality of this Legislature is that compromise is not  
7 optional" said Windham County's only independent lawmaker,  
8 Rep. Laura Sibilia (I-Dover, Jamaica, Somerset, Stratton, and  
9 Wardsboro).

10 Sibilia is returning to the House of Representatives with  
11 an agenda to strengthen systems that are under real strain. She is

12 the ranking member of the House Energy & Digital Infrastructure  
13 Committee, the ranking member of the House Rural Economic  
14 Development Caucus, co-chair of the Vermont National Guard &  
15 Veterans Affairs Legislative Caucus, and co-founder and co-chair  
16 of the House Discrimination Panel, among other committees.

17 Education is one of her main concerns.

18 "Vermont's public education system is changing in an  
19 urgent and haphazard way," Sibilia said. "State policy, leadership,  
20 and support is not moving at the same pace.

21 "The folks on the ground are making the best decisions  
22 they can within their sphere of responsibility and with the  
23 perspective and tools that are available to them," she continued.  
24 "The result is that local control is remaking the geographic  
25 availability of public education in the state of Vermont without a  
26 statewide or future needs perspective."

27 Progress on education reform is always very difficult  
28 "because it is so personal for so many," Sibilia said.

29 "Many people have deep-seated beliefs around  
30 education," she said. "Success usually brings together  
31 unexpected and unlikely alliances."

32 The continuing electrification of energy is another of her  
33 concerns.

34 "Electrification of the energy sector is moving forward  
35 without American leadership," Sibilia said. "This means that  
36 especially poor and rural Americans and Vermonters are being  
37 left behind — as they always are in market-driven  
38 transformations."

39 She also wants to address how Vermont handles large  
40 electric loads like data centers. She hopes to increase the  
41 oversight of major energy and transmission decisions. She also  
42 advocates closing a lobbying loophole and improving legislative  
43 oversight of cybersecurity for public systems.

## 44 'The difficulty isn't a lack of

### 45 ideas'

46 Among Sibilia's other concerns, she wants to fix notice  
47 and fairness problems in Act 181, which modernizes Act 250, the  
48 state's land-use and development law, originally enacted in 1970.

49 She also supports some small targeted bills related to  
50 child care subsidy eligibility and telecommunications consumer  
51 protection.

52 "These are about protecting Vermonters as conditions  
53 change and helping them adapt to change," Sibilia said.

54 Federal help with the costs of natural disasters is  
55 diminishing, and Sibilia wants to figure out another way to  
56 protect Vermonters and "to ensure that we are prepared" under  
57 current realities.

58 Difficulties and roadblocks are proliferating, she said.

59 "The difficulty isn't a lack of ideas," Sibilia said. "It is that  
60 our systems were not built for this pace or complexity of change."

61 Vermont, she said, "has relied heavily on federal funding  
62 to stabilize things, and while new federal support for rural health  
63 care may buy us some time, it does not solve the underlying  
64 structural problems of our demographics and risk pool."

65 No matter what the difficulties, Sibilia has one  
66 overreaching priority.

67 "My priority is protecting all Vermonters' legal, civil, and  
68 human rights regardless of immigration status, gender, religious  
69 affiliation, or sexual orientation," she said. "Protecting older  
70 Vermonters, LGBTQIA people, poor people, and immigrants  
71 means strong oversight and government that leads, not observes.  
72 Vulnerable people are the first to be harmed when systems fail."

73 The administration of Gov. Phil Scott must cooperate  
74 with the Legislature, Sibilia said.

75 "Neither the governor nor either party can accomplish  
76 much on their own," she said. "Compromise is not optional."

77 Vermonters need help, and they need it from a government that  
78 can still function."

79 She said she believes deeply in the power of people and  
80 in democratic self-government, "even as the rule of law and  
81 democratic norms are under attack nationally."

82 "If we want Vermont to remain strong, we need to invest  
83 in state, regional, and local capacity and focus on making  
84 systems work, especially in rural communities," Sibilia said.

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