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Notes from editor (not for publication):

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.

‘The difficulty isn’t a lack of ideas’

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to fix notice and fairness problems in Act 181, which modernizes Act 250, the state’s land-use and development law, originally enacted in 1970.

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

“These are about protecting Vermonters as conditions change and helping them adapt to change,” Sibia said.

Federal help with the costs of natural disasters is diminishing, and Sibia wants to figure out another way to protect Vermonters and “to ensure that we are prepared” under current realities.

Difficulties and roadblocks are proliferating, she said.

“The difficulty isn’t a lack of ideas,” Sibia said. “It is that our systems were not built for this pace or complexity of change.”

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

No matter what the difficulties, Sibia has one overreaching priority.

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

The administration of Gov. Phil Scott must cooperate with the Legislature, Sibia said.

“Neither the governor nor either party can accomplish 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,” Sibia said.

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