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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Hi, Michelle — I cleaned it up a bit and compressed it. As always, feel free to arm wrestle over edits. I am so happy you are thriving. I’ve lost two uncles to lung cancer, and with their heavy smoking (and less decades of scientific advancement) they were not nearly so lucky. Continued good thoughts for your good health, my friend. —Jeff

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 ‘I am thriving with cancer’

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 A life-altering diagnosis leads one lawmaker to a deeper
3 sense of purpose — in health, in community, and in government

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 MY PHONE was vibrating. “Dr. Fuld Oncology” appeared
6 on the screen.

7 I was two weeks into my journey of having unexpectedly
8 developed lung cancer as a 59-year-old never-smoker.

9 I wasn't sure what to expect. Lung cancer is the biggest
10 killer of all cancers. It causes more deaths than colorectal,
11 prostate and breast cancer combined. It isn't an easy one to put
12 in remission.

13 After googling and one appointment with Dr. Fuld, I
14 knew that most people with cancer at the stage I have don't make
15 it five years. He had told me to "hope one of the genetic
16 mutations caused your cancer."

17 If so, effective targeted therapies would provide my best
18 chance for high life quality and longer survival.

19 When the call came in, I was sitting in committee room
20 #49 in the Vermont State House attending a single-day special
21 meeting of the Agriculture, Food Resiliency and Forestry
22 Committee, on which I had served for the past year.

23 I took the call, slipping into an empty room which was
24 easy to find because it was mid-November and we weren't in
25 session.

26 "You won the lottery," Dr. Fuld told me. "You have the
27 ALK genetic mutation."

28 "What does that mean?" I replied.

29 He told me that ALK (anaplastic lymphoma kinase) lung
30 cancer. I would have to take highly effective daily chemotherapy
31 pills — "a targeted oral treatment" — that in 80% of cases
32 extends survival significantly and provides a good quality of life,
33 he said.

34 I asked Dr. Fuld my prognosis.

35 It would be almost impossible to say, because the
36 survival rates are so good with new treatments that people are
37 surviving many years on the second- and third-generation
38 targeted therapies.

39 The data isn't all in because so many people are
40 surviving instead of dying, so statistics can't accurately predict
41 how long any one person will survive.

42 * * *

43 MY TYPE OF LUNG CANCER occurs in about 3-4% of cases
44 among people who are mostly non-smokers and are younger than
45 the average lung cancer patient.

46 I have gone to one conference, joined groups online, and
47 begun volunteering as a support group facilitator in an online
48 meetup. I have made two ALK Vermont friends: One is 51, the
49 other 38. Both are nonsmokers.

50 I know of a number of people who are 15 years into an
51 ALK diagnosis and a few others who are at 20! I recently read
52 that a study in Australia from 2004 to 2024 showed a projected
53 median survival rate of 13.7 years for ALK nonsmokers.

54 That was the final piece of data I needed to decide I
55 could responsibly make another run for re-election.

56 * * *

57 MY BROTHER, unfortunately, also has advanced metastatic
58 cancer, and his diagnosis came a year before mine. In reading up
59 extensively to help and support him when he was newly
60 diagnosed, I became convinced that a fully-plant-based, whole
61 foods diet with an abundance of fresh produce would be an
62 effective way to help fight cancer.

63 He was not interested in going vegan, but I switched over
64 fully the day I got my cancer diagnosis.

65 I make smoothies every morning with lots of kale,
66 parsley, raspberries, walnuts, oats, and more. I make a batch of
67 carrot, beet, celery, and kale juice at the beginning of the week
68 and drink one glass every day.

69 I eat a giant salad every day, and my other meal is filled
70 with cooked vegetables, tofu, or beans and some whole grain like
71 brown rice or farro. I am eating as healthfully as possible and
72 truly feel well. I am getting good rest at night and am full of
73 energy all day.

74 I truly have never felt healthier in my life, except I have
75 cancer.

76 I have had two scans so far: My baseline scan showed
77 five impacted lymph nodes and one small nodule in my right

78 lung, and a second scan two months after I started taking
79 Lorlatinib showed my cancer reduced by almost 50%!

80 This means I am responding favorably to the medication
81 and am likely to continue to be in that 80% of people who
82 survive for a good long time.

83 * * *

84 I HAVE BEEN fortunate to have only two side effects.

85 I have neuropathy in three fingers in my right hand (a
86 weird, tingly sensation accompanied by skin discoloration), and
87 my left foot became swollen after a two-hour plane ride. Swelling
88 with altitude changes is a common side effect, and it hasn't fully
89 gone back to normal two months later.

90 Thankfully, with tai chi and walking at least 2 miles daily,
91 I can keep the foot swelling down.

92 One day I had to work on a bill presentation and didn't
93 have time to do tai chi or walk in the morning. When I got out of
94 the car after returning home, my foot had returned to
95 uncomfortable proportions. This reinforced my commitment to
96 this daily routine. A special type of massage that addresses lymph
97 circulation every two weeks helps, too.

98 A voracious reader, I have consumed a couple dozen
99 books about cancer recently. When I learn about a problem, I try
100 to understand it and then figure out the best plan to address it. I
101 do this as a person living with cancer, and I do this as a legislator.

102 From 23-year cancer survivor who is also an author, I
103 learned a term that I, too, intend to embrace: "cancer thriver."

104 I'm not just surviving, which for some people in some
105 situations is a miracle. Except for my slightly swollen foot, I truly
106 feel great. I am eating well, exercising every day, doing work I
107 love, connecting with friends.

108 I did not know this would be the case, but I am thriving
109 with cancer.

110 * * *

111 AS I REALIZED that I was a cancer thriver, I also realized
112 that I very much wanted to run for re-election for a fourth term.

113 I was intending to step down and spent several months
114 thinking that was my path, but not only do I very much enjoy
115 representing northern Windham County in the state Legislature, I
116 love working on my new committee placement this biennium.

117 I have been a member of the Agriculture, Food
118 Resiliency, and Forestry Committee, an assignment that has
119 shown me how well government can work.

120 My colleagues and I represent both parties. When we are
121 in the House Chamber, about half of our committee's members
122 vote pretty differently from me on a number of important issues,
123 but in our committee room, we talk, we listen, and we usually
124 come to agreement.

125 Sometimes I move their direction, and sometimes they
126 move mine. Occasionally we don't reach a compromise we can
127 all support. But it is civil, kind, thoughtful, and the way all levels
128 of government should work.

129 I want to keep serving on this committee. I want to keep
130 working on issues of food security, food as medicine, restricting
131 rodenticides to protect wildlife, and supporting policies that can
132 improve Vermont school meals.

133 * * *

134 IT LOOKS LIKE I will need another biennium to revise
135 H.613, my bill to increase police training hours and improve
136 victim services in situations where the police are called to an
137 incident with an individual experiencing a mental-health crisis.

138 I worked closely developing H.613 with the Garvey
139 family, who lost their son and brother, Scott, in Putney when the
140 police were called on a day when he was struggling with his
141 mental health.

142 Scott lost his life. He was shot in his apartment by a
143 trooper from the Vermont State Police.

144 These situations are complicated, and additional training
145 of police, who often are the primary responders to this type of
146 situation, could save lives. At eight required hours of mental
147 health training for its new officers, the state is tied for the lowest

148 number of training hours in the U.S., where 15 hours is the
149 average instruction time required. My bill would get us up to that
150 level, nearly doubling our mental health training and
151 deescalation training. If enacted, this law could prevent tragedies.

152 H.613 is the most important bill I have worked on. I will
153 definitely introduce a similar bill next year.

154 I was a volunteer educator and support-group facilitator
155 with the Vermont chapter of NAMI (the National Alliance on
156 Mental Illness) for many years before I was elected, and I had
157 hoped to work on mental health policy.

158 I didn't get assigned to a committee of jurisdiction, and I
159 developed other areas of focus as a legislator, but this issue —
160 preventing deaths of individuals when they have interactions with
161 the Vermont State Police and preventing tragedy for individuals
162 living with mental illness — is of critical importance. I want to
163 make it happen.

164 * * *

165 EXCEPT FOR THE CANCER, I have never felt better. I am
166 eating well, exercising every day, and I truly feel great.

167 I am grateful to be a person who gets to take advantage
168 of scientific advances that enable me to continue my life as it was
169 before my diagnosis. My primary treatment — swallowing three
170 little tablets — takes less than a minute a day to complete. I am
171 very lucky.

172 Last fall, I didn't know what to expect. Now that I know I
173 can live well with cancer, likely for many years to come, I have
174 lots of things in the Legislature and out that will be keeping me
175 busy. One priority? Our country in many ways is a horror show. I
176 want to join all Americans in fighting to preserve our democracy.

177 And along the way, I plan to appreciate each day, each
178 week, each victory in the statehouse, and each scan that shows
179 my cancer is not spreading.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

180 **MICHELLE BOS-LUN** (D-Windham-3), is a third-term
181 Democrat representing Westminster, Rockingham, and Brookline.
182 She is a teacher and has worked in restorative justice.

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

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####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

184

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

185

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

186

####END LOGLINE####