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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Land-use policy won't work if Vermonters aren't part of it

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Repealing parts of Act 181 is the first step to rebuilding  
3 trust and moving forward with rural Vermonters. This is not about  
4 stopping progress. It is about making sure progress is lasting.

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 VERMONT HAS A responsibility to address climate change  
7 and protect our communities and the natural systems that support  
8 us. We have seen firsthand the damage a changing climate is  
9 doing across our state, from flooding that damages homes and  
10 roads to increasing wildfire risk and the growing threat to species  
11 we depend on.

12 In that context, Act 181 of 2024 is a large and complex  
13 update to our land-use laws which changes how decisions about  
14 land are made and adds new protections for land and water that  
15 support us. Advocates have rightly emphasized the importance of  
16 protecting biodiversity as part of this work.

17 Two years later, many Vermonters are just beginning to  
18 understand all that Act 181 does and how it could affect their  
19 land, and the reaction is telling. We are seeing deep concern and  
20 frustration that reflect how much of this work moved forward  
21 without them.

22 The reaction is not a misunderstanding. It is an important  
23 signal. We did not do the work to meaningfully engage rural  
24 Vermonters in decisions about their land before moving forward,  
25 and we are paying for that now.

26 We are paying for it in the most important currency we  
27 have on climate and land use policy: time.

28 When people are left out of decisions about their land,  
29 they will naturally push back. What Vermonters are experiencing  
30 is that their land is being discussed, maps and rules are being  
31 developed, and they do not hear themselves reflected — at all —  
32 in those conversations.

33 When they raise concerns, they are frequently being told  
34 they are misinformed. Some are still learning about the law, and  
35 fear is running high.

36 But that fear is not the issue. It is the result of being left  
37 out of decisions about their land.

38 We in the Legislature have set up an adversarial  
39 situation, whether we intended to or not, and rural Vermonters  
40 are experiencing it that way.

41 Instead of moving forward with clarity and a shared  
42 purpose, we are now debating timelines, delaying  
43 implementation, and trying to rebuild trust after the fact. That is  
44 time we did not have to waste, not on housing, not on  
45 infrastructure, and not on protecting our communities from  
46 weather risks we are already facing.

47 \* \* \*

48 I VOTED AGAINST Act 181 in 2024 for this reason. It was a  
49 large and historic bill that will shape Vermont for decades, and  
50 we did not have a real plan to go out and talk with rural  
51 Vermonters about what we were proposing for their land. I voted  
52 to uphold the governor's veto for the same reason.

53 Since the Legislature overrode the veto and the bill  
54 became law, I urged that we slow down and do that work.

55 There has been some good faith effort. Anne Watson,  
56 now chairing the Senate Natural Resources and Energy  
57 Committee, has worked publicly and sincerely to respond.  
58 Scientists and planners have brought critical knowledge to the  
59 actual implementation work. But we are not where we need to  
60 be, and continuing on the current path will only make the  
61 problem worse.

62 At the same time, I see political opportunists using this  
63 conflict for electoral gain, rather than working toward solutions.  
64 That will only deepen division and delay the work that needs to  
65 be done with our communities.

66 \* \* \*

67 IF THE LEGISLATURE wants to move forward, we will have  
68 to change how we are doing this work. That starts with  
69 acknowledging that we got the sequence wrong.

70 We moved ahead without enough shared understanding  
71 with rural Vermonters of what this would mean for their land and  
72 communities, and we are seeing the consequences of that now.

73 That is why I believe we need to repeal Tier 3 and the  
74 road rule in Act 181 and rebuild this work with rural Vermonters  
75 at the beginning of the conversation.

76 This is not about stopping progress. It is about making  
77 sure progress is lasting.

78 Vermont still needs to protect our communities from  
79 flooding and safeguard the natural systems that support life in  
80 Vermont. But we will not get there by imposing a system people  
81 do not trust.

82 We already have examples of how to do this well.  
83 Vermont's work on resilience and hazard mitigation starts with  
84 communities, focuses on real risks like flooding, infrastructure  
85 damage, and public safety, and brings together local knowledge  
86 with scientific expertise to identify solutions that will work on the  
87 ground in that area.

88 That approach builds trust and leads to effective action.  
89 We should be building from those efforts, not working around  
90 them.

91 Applying that approach here means starting in the same  
92 place. That means going town by town and having a real  
93 dialogue about what needs to be protected. It means recognizing  
94 that the people who live in rural Vermont also care deeply about  
95 the land and bring important knowledge about how it is used and  
96 stewarded.

97 Some may welcome resources and technical assistance,  
98 and others may see things differently. The state's role should be to  
99 support and partner, bringing together expert local knowledge  
100 with the expertise of scientists and environmental professionals.

101 If we do that work first, we have a chance to move  
102 forward with clarity and shared purpose.

103 If we do not, we will continue to face delays, conflict,  
104 and lost time.

105 And the longer we wait to do that, the more time we  
106 lose.

107 \* \* \*

108 *Editor's note: Since this piece was submitted, House*  
109 *Speaker Jill Krowinski issued a written statement that*  
110 *acknowledged that, while parts of Act 181 "are working well,"*  
111 *other parts of the law "are problematic and need to be*  
112 *addressed."*

113 *"Vermonters have made it clear that they have not felt*  
114 *heard or a part of the process, especially in rulemaking for the*  
115 *road rule and Tier 3, and that has led to fear and frustration on*  
116 *how this could impact their lives," she said.*

117           *“While this has caused fear and anxiety, we are going to*  
118 *make this an opportunity to engage deeply with Vermonters and*  
119 *work together to listen, learn, and find solutions together.*  
120 *Vermonters are concerned about the restrictions and cost this will*  
121 *have on their land and the impact it will have on their families*  
122 *and future generations.*

123           *“I am putting out this statement as a first step in saying: I*  
124 *hear you and we will work together to get this right.”*

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

125           **LAURA SIBILIA** , an independent, represents the  
126 Windham-2 district (Dover, Jamaica, Somerset, Stratton, and  
127 Wardsboro) in the Vermont House of Representatives.

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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