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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Nice profile! I nudged the end, which read as though it should have been with the other quotes at the beginning. Also, I added some bridging material around line 54 to make that section clearer.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 'A lesson in grace'

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Colleagues laud state Rep. Mollie Burke, who will retire
3 at the end of her ninth term and 18 years of making her mark on
4 policies and state law affecting transportation, the environment,
5 and the arts

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 Serving in the Legislature with Brattleboro's Rep. Mollie
8 Burke, D-Windham-8, has been "a lesson in grace," said her
9 colleague, Emilie Kornheiser, who represents the town's
10 Windham-7 district.

11 When her term ends, Burke, a nine-term lawmaker, will
12 retire after serving for 18 years.

13 “Mollie is connected to so many people in our
14 community,” Kornheiser said. “She helps folks access government
15 and navigate tough times with a singular energy and focus. In the
16 Statehouse, she makes quiet lasting friendships and navigates
17 tough issues with curiosity.”

18 Sen. Alison Clarkson, D-Windsor, chair of the Senate
19 Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General
20 Affairs, also used the word “grace” when talking about Burke.
21 She also praised her vision and her “big heart” in describing
22 Burke as “a passionate advocate for the environment” who co-
23 chaired the Climate Solutions Caucus and the Women’s Caucus.

24 “Mollie has championed a range of efforts designed to
25 reduce climate change, from investing in our transition to electric
26 vehicles, public transportation, and walkable downtowns and
27 village centers, to reducing our dependence on fossil fuels,”
28 Clarkson said.

29 “The Legislature is richer for having had Mollie as a
30 member and her creative voice and sensibility and her gift for
31 building community will be sorely missed,” she said.

32 **Making room for new, younger** 33 **lawmakers**

34 Burke said her decision to leave was not made lightly.

35 “I have been thinking about it for a while,” she said. “I
36 pretty much knew that that this would be my last session, just
37 because there are other things I want to do. And I want to go out
38 when I still feel really energetic and present. I wouldn’t want to
39 be hanging on forever.”

40 Burke said that her open seat would “give other people
41 an opportunity to serve” and believes it’s “especially important to
42 have younger people in the Legislature.”

43 But she's worried that it's difficult for many of those same
44 people to serve during what she called their "prime earning
45 years."

46 "A few young women are leaving the Legislature because
47 they can't afford it," she said. "And somebody who left a few
48 years ago said to me, 'If they'd only pay my health insurance, I
49 could stay.'"

50 Legislators are paid \$897.29 per week, plus a per diem
51 for meals, \$167 per night for lodging, and mileage
52 reimbursement. The Legislature is in session from January through
53 mid-May or early June.

54 In theory and by design — including the part-time
55 lawmaking — the Legislature is meant to encourage democracy
56 by "citizen legislators," not professional politicians. In practice,
57 "unless you have another job that's going to pay you enough, and
58 give you the time off, it's very hard," Burke said.

59 "As I leave the Legislature, I'm thinking of what things
60 could be improved, and one thing would be pay," she said. "But,
61 of course, we tried to raise legislative pay a few years ago, and
62 the governor vetoed it."

63 **More complexity**

64 Burke said that during her tenure in office, issues have
65 become much more complex — "and there's certainly less
66 money, especially now with the federal withdrawal of support in
67 many areas."

68 One important change in the Statehouse — a "sign of the
69 times," she said — has been security.

70 "It used to be that anybody could just walk in the door
71 without going through a metal detector or anything else," Burke
72 said. "And now they've instituted a single point of entry."

73 She described the measure as sad but necessary "in these
74 times of angry people and people who get upset about things
75 they see on social media."

76 Burke said the Statehouse itself is what she will miss
77 most of all.

78 "What I love is just sitting in the Chamber and looking
79 around at the beautiful room," Burke said of the "very vibrant
80 place."

81 "Then also walking in in the morning, when they have
82 this beehive of activity. There's school groups coming, and
83 advocates coming for this or that cause, and you see somebody
84 and you have a connection somehow," she added.

85 "There's a group of us who work in the lounge at night.
86 And sometimes I'm just one of two or three people still in the
87 Statehouse. At night, it's really like: This is your house."

88 Burke will also miss many of the people she has worked
89 with.

90 "There's a lot to lose, having friendships with people I
91 didn't ordinarily interact with," she said. "Getting to know people
92 from other parts of the state, other parties, other ideas. It's a very
93 rich environment."

94 **Outside influences**

95 A sign of the times changing is that right-wing political
96 organizations, such as the Campaign for Vermont, funded in part
97 by the Koch family, are now trying to influence elections in
98 Vermont.

99 "They are trying to discredit a lot of Democratic
100 priorities," Burke said. "Last year during the elections, Gov. Phil
101 Scott (a Republican) went around the state saying that the
102 Legislature raised the property taxes, which was not accurate at
103 all. That's not the way the education funding works. But
104 Democrats lost a lot of seats because of that."

105 Scott's vision for Vermont is extremely limited, Burke
106 said.

107 "For example, the last session when we had a
108 supermajority, Phil Scott vetoed the child care bill," Burke said.
109 "We overcame that veto, thankfully."

110 He vetoed the bill “because there was a very small
111 payroll tax added to fund that,” she said.

112 She defended the bill, now law, which “gives more
113 subsidies to people. More people can afford child care. It’s
114 helped child care workers get more pay, which has been a big
115 issue, and it’s helped child care centers open more spaces. It’s
116 been an economic benefit. More people are able to go to work.”

117 Scott’s veto demonstrates “a very narrow way of looking
118 at things,” she said: “‘Well, we can’t do that because we’re trying
119 to make Vermont more affordable, so we can’t tax anybody
120 anymore.’ But if this tax is leading to economic growth, better
121 pay for child care workers, and the ability of anybody who used
122 to stay at home with a child and can now go to work, then that is
123 a plus.

124 “We need is a wider vision for how to improve the lives
125 of Vermonters without just saying, ‘No, no, no, no taxes, no taxes,
126 no, nothing!’” Burke said.

127 **Going green**

128 Burke first ran for office because she was concerned
129 about climate change and desired to cut Vermont’s greenhouse
130 gas emissions, a concern that has only deepened with time. She
131 was elected in 2008. She asked for and received a seat on the
132 Transportation Committee when she arrived in Montpelier.

133 She has served on that committee ever since.

134 “Her singular focus on climate change and transportation
135 means that she’s been able to make a sizable and lasting impact
136 in her time in the House,” Kornheiser said.

137 She sponsored the first [safe passing law for bicyclists](#) in
138 2010 and the first [“Complete Streets” law](#) in 2011. “Complete
139 Streets” means that a transportation project needs to take into
140 account all the users of the transportation system, not just
141 automobiles.

142 “That was a milestone bill that has been expanded in the
143 years since, but, at the time, it was quite revolutionary,” Burke
144 said.

145 In 2013, she became the lead House sponsor of a bill
146 that would allow undocumented residents to obtain a driving
147 privilege card. An analogous bill in the Senate ultimately made its
148 way into law.

149 “The immigrant farmworkers who keep Vermont’s dairy
150 industry alive were strong advocates for this law, and they needed
151 a sponsor to guide the legislation through,” Burke said. “The law
152 gave them the legal right to drive and acknowledged their vital
153 role in Vermont’s economy.”

154 **A host of accomplishments**

155 Of special interest to Windham County, Burke’s
156 committee oversaw the multiyear construction of the Interstate 91
157 bridge over the West River in Brattleboro. She was also an official
158 stakeholder in conversations with Amtrak over the decision to
159 build a new, now mostly-completed, train station.

160 Burke served on the two-state committee designing the
161 now-operational General John Stark Memorial Bridge over the
162 Connecticut River, connecting Brattleboro and Hinsdale. She
163 advocated on behalf of the town of Brattleboro for several paving
164 projects and for a reduced speed limit on Route 30.

165 She also worked with fellow committee members to set
166 up incentive programs to help low-and-moderate-income
167 Vermonters purchase electric vehicles and electric bicycles, or
168 more fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicles.

169 Also, Burke was one of the original sponsors of the
170 Working Lands Bill, [Act 142](#), which was designed to stimulate
171 economic development in Vermont’s agricultural and forest
172 products sectors through entrepreneurship, business development,
173 and job creation.

174 She recently co-sponsored a bill in the House that
175 establishes a farm-and-forestry special fund to help with recovery

176 from weather-related disasters. The Senate has just passed its
177 version of the bill.

178 Burke is also the co-chair of the Climate Solutions
179 Caucus and the House appointee to the Public Transit Advisory
180 Council.

181 **An art-full life**

182 In 2025 and 2026, Burke brought her skills as an artist
183 and art teacher to the Statehouse to direct a community art
184 project for her legislative colleagues and staff.

185 This spring, her own work received a solo show there,
186 “Realism and Magical Realism.” As she described in a news
187 release promoting the event, her paintings and drawings “bring
188 the viewer into a dreamlike world filled with richly colored
189 environments that present a sense of place and home,
190 surrounded by nature.” Her work will be on display until Friday,
191 April 24.

192 One reason Burke is leaving the Legislature is because
193 she wants to spend more time in her studio and with her
194 nonprofit organization, Art in the Neighborhood, which she
195 founded before she entered state politics.

196 “I had been teaching art in various schools and places
197 and on summer programs,” she said. “I realized that there were a
198 whole lot of enrichment programs for kids in Brattleboro, but
199 there’s a whole group of kids whose parents could not afford
200 some of the enrichment activities. So I wanted to found a place
201 where I could provide tuition-free art classes to kids in affordable
202 housing communities in Brattleboro.”

203 The nonprofit now operates four locations. Burke is the
204 administrator and fundraiser of the program, and she hires artists
205 to teach.

206 She also has other priorities on her mind.

207 “There are also grandchildren to visit, and the
208 opportunity for more time on Nordic ski trails,” Burke said. “I

209 plan to continue working on environmental issues and
210 affordable, accessible transportation.”

211 Tristan Toleno, who represented District 9 for 12 years,
212 called working with Burke “an easy and joyful experience.”

213 While Burke has gained a reputation for
214 environmentalism and transportation, she has applied her
215 “focused excellence” to other interests — like the arts, he said.

216 “Her commitment to the arts and the economic value of
217 the arts was early and influential in reshaping the perception of
218 the arts economy,” Toleno said.

219 “She was, and is, a great champion for Brattleboro and
220 our community,” he said. “She sees it so clearly and deeply cares.
221 She has been skillful in using her role to support our most
222 vulnerable and to build on, and support, our strengths as a
223 community.”

224 Above all, Toleno said, Burke is “a wonderful, thoughtful
225 and kind person.”

226 “We all have been enriched by her service and
227 contributions,” he said.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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