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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Hi, Ann — Sorry for the lag in getting this in. —Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 A systems failure, not a partisan dispute

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 The legislative appropriations process functions as an  
3 accountability loop for the general fund and for the transportation  
4 fund. The education fund, supported largely by property taxes,  
5 operates outside that loop entirely.

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 VERMONT’S publicly funded education system is a  
8 community-based, statewide system tied together by its financing  
9 structure. It includes both public and private schools.

10 For any system to serve those who benefit from it and  
11 those who pay for it, three things are required: sound financing,  
12 effective governance, and transparent accountability.

13 Prior to Act 60 and Act 68, all three conditions existed in  
14 every Vermont school district — tested and renewed at every  
15 Town Meeting. When Act 60 was enacted in 1997 and adjusted  
16 by Act 68 in 2003, these laws restructured only the financing.  
17 Governance remained largely unchanged.

18 But the accountability loop, in which voters could  
19 question the outcomes of the prior year's spending before  
20 approving new expenditures, was broken, and was never  
21 replaced.

22 \* \* \*

23 IN FEBRUARY, Kaj Samsom, commissioner of Vermont's  
24 Department of Financial Regulation, wrote a compelling [opinion](#)  
25 [piece](#) arguing that existing frameworks for delivering education  
26 reflect a "structural lack of accountability and misaligned  
27 incentives."

28 Samson identified the same problem in housing and  
29 healthcare, but it is education that is driving property taxpayers'  
30 alarm and occupying the Legislature and governor today.

31 The power of accountability depends on the questions  
32 asked — and answered — before voters or their representatives  
33 authorize taxes and spending.

34 In my 10 years in the Legislature, including six on the  
35 Appropriations Committee, I saw how the legislative  
36 appropriations process functions as an accountability loop for the  
37 general fund, into which Vermonters' income taxes are deposited,  
38 and for the transportation fund.

39 The education fund, supported largely by property taxes,  
40 operates outside that loop entirely.

41 \* \* \*

42 IT REMAINS to be seen what this year's legislative and  
43 administrative actions will produce. What is emerging appears to

44 be, yet again, a reconfiguration of governance and an adjustment  
45 to how money flows into and out of the education fund.

46 What it does not appear to address is systemic  
47 accountability for the outcomes that money is meant to achieve,  
48 nor does it treat the system as a bottom-up, community-based  
49 enterprise best guided by carrots and sticks rather than top-down  
50 mandates.

51 The current conversation continues to frame local  
52 communities — the very people responsible for results on the  
53 ground — as the problem, as though overspending were a matter  
54 of local bad faith rather than structural incentive.

55 It does not reckon with the governor’s and the  
56 Legislature’s own roles — new laws enacted over decades which  
57 have driven expenditures upward across the entire system. The  
58 Joint Fiscal Office’s authoritative annual publication “Fiscal Facts”  
59 tracks the fiscal impact of new laws on the general fund and the  
60 transportation fund — but not on the education fund.

61 This is a systems failure, not a partisan dispute. It has  
62 persisted through every administration and legislative majority  
63 since Act 60. Continuing to treat it as anything else only prolongs  
64 the problem.

65 Absent explicit requirements for transparent, ongoing  
66 evaluation of savings from governance restructuring and for  
67 measurable student outcome changes tied to a foundation  
68 formula, the system will remain unable to deliver its full value:  
69 educating Vermont’s children at a cost taxpayers are willing to  
70 sustain.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

71 **ANN MANWARING** represented Halifax, Whitingham,  
72 and Wilmington in the Vermont House of Representatives from  
73 2007 to 2017.

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

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