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Notes from editor (not for publication):

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 What did the Legislature accomplish this session? It
2 depends on whom you ask.

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3 Both parties tout victories as the Aug. 11 party primaries
4 loom near

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 Now that the 2025-26 Vermont Legislative session is in
7 the books, both Democrats and Republicans are claiming wins.
8 And as we head into the Aug. 11 party primaries, both
9 sides are campaigning on what they have already accomplished.
10 Whoever wins or loses, Vermont politics is about to
11 change dramatically. One reason is that more than 30 legislators

12 are retiring this year. Among the most notable are two Democrats,
13 Speaker of the House Jill Krowinski and Senate President Pro Tem
14 Phil Baruth.

15 With many committee chair leadership positions
16 becoming vacant because of these retirements, the upcoming
17 elections will be vital in deciding how the Legislature functions
18 in the 2026 biennium.

19 Nationally, Republicans flipped enough legislative seats
20 in statehouses to provide a net 50-seat gain, and half of those
21 wins alone came from Vermont.

22 In Vermont's last election, Republicans won a net 19
23 seats out of 150 in the House and boosted their minority caucus
24 from 37 members to 56. In the Senate, Republicans flipped six
25 seats in the 30-seat chamber and brought their caucus to 13.

26 Though State Democrats and their allies in the
27 Progressive Party still controlled the agenda in both chambers
28 during the last session, Republicans, including Gov. Phil Scott,
29 are still publicly gloating over the fall of the Democratic-plus-
30 Progressive 2023-24 supermajority that overrode six of Scott's
31 vetoes in 2024.

32 Will the new 2026-28 Legislature completely retreat
33 from its former progressive policies? Will it change its agenda?
34 Will it reshuffle its priorities?

35 Competing visions

36 Two potential visions are competing for the 2027-28
37 Legislative biennium.

38 "We've now spent an entire session undoing harmful
39 policies passed by the previous supermajority," Scott said at a
40 press conference in June.

41 The chair of the Vermont Republican Party, Paul Dame,
42 as reported by VTDigger, said in a newsletter that "if Vermont's
43 Republicans are not the most effective minority in any legislature
44 in the country, then I'd like to hear who is."

He went on to say that the GOP accomplished its goals,
“in ways that seemed impossible just two years ago.”

Meanwhile, Democrats are claiming success in the areas
of affordability, protecting Vermonters from forced school mergers
and health care, among other priorities from across the aisle.

The last Legislature revised Act 181 and did away with
the Clean Heat Standard, which did not yet even exist, to give
two examples of its retreat from supermajority status.

It left some vital issues like education, housing,
economic development, and healthcare for the next Legislature
to solve.

“Leadership turnover, retirements, loss of veto-proof
majorities, and a different political center of gravity mean 2027
will not be business as usual,” said Andrew Brewer, manager of
government and public affairs at Down Rachlin Martin, the state’s
largest law firm.

Brewer offered his opinions on the session that has just
ended, and the 2027-28 session to come, at the Brattleboro
Development Credit Corp. (BDCC) CEO roundtable at the SIT
International Center in Brattleboro on July 7.

‘Reset and retreat’

Brewer called the 2024 general election “kind of a bit of
a red wave.”

“The basic takeaway that this was a session of reset and
retreat,” he said.

“Especially, the Legislature backed away from some big
supermajority area policies around Act 250, education, of course,
a clean heat standard, maybe even a change of mindset about
broad mandates for future legislators and legislatures to deal
with,” Brewer continued.

He said none of these issues are dead, “but education,
housing, land use, economic development, and healthcare are all
being reworked. And they require a lot more work moving
forward, but again, with different leaders, with different mindset,

79 a reshuffle,” he said. “There’s a lot of turnover and retirements,
80 and that’s going to be really impactful next session.”

81 The new key word in Vermont politics is “affordability.”

82 Vermonters in general feel that the state has become too
83 expensive. The population is small, property taxes keep rising,
84 housing (especially affordable housing) is still largely unavailable,
85 the healthcare system is crumbling, and poll after poll shows
86 younger people saying they cannot afford to remain here to raise
87 their families.

88 While most people praise Vermont for its natural beauty
89 and its deep sense of community, these attributes have become
90 almost unreachable luxuries for a large majority of Vermonters as
91 well as would-be Vermonters.

92 Legislators in the 2025-26 session recognized this.

93 With Democrats still in the majority in the House and
94 Senate, they “responded to the call from Vermonters across the
95 state to prioritize the cost of living,” said state Sen. Wendy
96 Harrison, D-Windham.

97 **Some wins, some losses**

98 One of the most important things that the Legislature
99 accomplished was to stop Scott’s plan to consolidate all of
100 Vermont’s school districts into five super-districts, lawmakers
101 have said.

102 “What we heard loud and clear, across the state is that
103 the governor’s plan to take the current 119 school districts and
104 squeeze them into five mega-districts was not the way to go,”
105 Rep. Mike Mrowicki, D-Putney, said in an end-of-session
106 message to voters. “Fiscal models also showed there really
107 weren’t savings in that plan.”

108 “Democrats stood up for our constituents, who were
109 loud and clear that they did not want Gov. Scott’s forced mergers,
110 and instead worked with community members, education
111 leaders, parents, and students to advance a voluntary,

112 community-driven education reform process that is focused on
113 quality, equity and affordability,” she added.

114 When it came to Act 250, after the Land Use Review
115 Board released preliminary conservation maps that did not match
116 Act 181’s intent — and a backlash that followed the release —
117 “Democrats acted swiftly by rolling back the conservation-
118 mapping provisions,” Harrison said. “Democrats were responsive
119 to constituents, not to Republican pressure.”

120 Additionally, Democrats led movements to successfully
121 increase renter and down-payment assistance tax credits,
122 Harrison said. They invested \$36 million in building more
123 housing that Vermonters can afford. And they removed local
124 zoning practices that have stymied new housing development.

125 “We passed legislation to stabilize education funding
126 and reduce pressure on property taxpayers,” Harrison said. “We
127 passed a tax on second homes and set the stage for a ‘foundation
128 formula,’ which will make education spending more predictable
129 and equitable.”

130 Democrats also “prioritized protecting Vermonters from
131 the harms of the Trump administration,” Harrison said.

132 “We passed legislation that will ensure Vermont schools
133 do not provide sensitive information about a student to a federal
134 agency,” Harrison said. “It will require that a federal immigration
135 authority present a judicial warrant before entering a school.”

136 Democrats also gave Vermonters “a stronger path to
137 protect themselves from and seek accountability for unlawful
138 searches, violations of free speech, due process, or equal
139 protection under the law,” Harrison said. “We expanded
140 protections against warrantless civil arrests in schools, polling
141 places, healthcare facilities, and other sensitive locations.”

142 The Legislature also “passed legislation to control
143 skyrocketing healthcare costs, which impact Vermont families,
144 small businesses, school budgets, and property tax payers,”
145 Harrison said. “This bill would have lowered premiums, with
146 savings beginning in 2027. Democratic leadership created and

147 passed this bill with large bipartisan majorities, and then it was
148 vetoed by Gov. Scott, who sided with industry interests over the
149 affordability needs of Vermonters.”

150 Data centers were another issue where Democrats
151 conflicted with Scott, who vetoed their data center protections
152 bill to ensure Vermonters don’t subsidize large tech corporations
153 parachuting into the state and using its land and water for private
154 profit.

155 Scott vetoed the bill after the Koch political network
156 fought it, reported the [Vermont Natural Resources Council](#),
157 despite “overwhelming, tripartisan support, passing 26-3 in the
158 Senate and with a near-unanimous voice vote in the House.”

159 The main issues in the Legislature last year were livability
160 and affordability, with more than 100 new laws on a range of
161 issues, including disaster relief for farmers, survivor benefits, debt
162 collection, event ticketing, business growth, unclaimed property,
163 drug prices, green energy, consumer protection.

164 “This past year, Democrats led a bipartisan majority to
165 advance legislation laser-focused on addressing the cost of living
166 and protecting Vermonters from the harms of the Trump
167 administration and large outside corporate interests,” Harrison
168 said.

169 “On healthcare, we’ve set in place steps to control costs,
170 especially on pharmaceuticals and by initiating referenced-based
171 pricing to make costs more uniform across the state,” Mrowicki
172 said.

173 He cited the new ArrayRx plan, the brainchild of State
174 Treasurer Mike Pieciak, in which Vermont plans to join Oregon,
175 Washington, Arizona, Nevada, and Connecticut to leverage
176 lower drug costs for their residents.

177 A federal waiver would be required “to help cover the
178 60% of Vermonters on Medicaid or Medicare.” Acknowledging
179 that there is “no hope” of getting that waiver from U.S. President
180 Donald Trump, “we are preparing for a leadership change in
181 2028, so we can be ready,” Mrowicki said.

Survey says...

While polls indicate that Scott — unopposed in the Republican primary election — still has the lead for the general election as he runs for an unprecedented sixth term in office, his approval ratings have dropped. The latest [University of New Hampshire Survey Center Green Mountain State Poll](#), released July 21, has him at 48% approval and 43% disapproval.

On the Democratic side, two women are competing in the Aug. 11 primary, Aly Richards and Amanda Janoo, with the winner facing Scott on the ballot in November.

Both have little name recognition now, but Scott's decline in public approval makes him more vulnerable to a Democratic challenger.

As Brewer describes it, "It's a recognition election. For both governor and lieutenant governor, the biggest 'candidate' in the race is the undecided voter."

The UNH polling supports that statement. In its latest poll, 52% of likely voters in the Democratic primary said they were undecided. The July poll also found Janoo has 26% to 19% lead over Richards.

The 2026 elections offer Vermonters "a new political landscape," Brewer said.

Some of the issues driving the election debate, Brewer said, will be education reform, its cost and its implementation; property taxes and affordability; land use and housing policy; health care costs; and workforce shortages.

"2026 was the reset," Brewer said. "2027 will determine the direction."

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