

Newsletter for Sep 16, 2026 : Brace Yourselves

Today in History:

1620: English colonists on the Mayflower set sail for America to found Plymouth, Massachusetts. It took a bit longer for European settlers to reach Vermont.

I Need Your Help

Thanks to all who helped out with my Postcard Party! Between those who showed up at the new Democratic County Headquarters on Saturday, and those who took postcards home to address, we have successfully addressed over 2000 cards!

This week I have another ask: can you write a letter to the editor of the Banner in support of my candidacy? A posting on Front Porch Forum would be great, too. Both of those will provide the visibility I need, and coming from those of you who believe in and support me will carry a lot of weight. Whether you voice your support for me, for me and Mike Nigro, or more broadly for Democratic candidates, you will be helping get the best candidates elected to the legislature to fight for Vermont's people and Vermont's future!

Incoming!

This week I received a postcard vilifying our Democratic State Senator Seth Bongartz. That postcard, which seems to be blanketing the county, gives Seth an "F" across the board, on "property tax relief," "Student Learning," "Local Control," "Fiscal Responsibility" and School Choice."

There's no real discussion of Seth's voting record or advocacy that would have affected these "grades". Indeed, the conditions he's accused of creating, to the extent that they can even be defined in a meaningful way, appear to have more to do with Governor Phil Scott's policies and actions than anything originating in the legislature. The group behind these postcards is listed as "Common Sense PAC" with a Manchester P.O. box as their address. The bulk mail account lists only "Voters First" which appears to be a Republican aligned marketing group. They could have been mailed from anywhere.

Now there are any number of PACs and other organizations using “Common Sense” in their name, but I couldn’t find one called simply “Common Sense PAC”. That leads me to believe that this one was created and funded for the express purpose of influencing our elections, specifically by smearing one candidate. And while the PAC claims to be “Not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee” it’s pretty clear who would benefit from this smear campaign. This stinks of outside dark money, the last thing we need here in Vermont.

In a recent op-ed in the Bennington Banner, Oliver Olson detailed just how inaccurate this postcard is: it totally distorts (and I am being kind) Senator Bongartz’s record and the impact of his record on education. A recent post to Front Porch Forum called on the likely beneficiaries of this postcard attack – Republican Senate candidates Josh Williams and Lawrence Whitmire – to disavow the postcards and the message. I stand behind that call, and respectfully request that they make a public statement to that effect. An apology wouldn’t be out of place, either.

Outside Money Does Not Belong in Vermont Elections

The US Supreme Court’s “Citizens United” decision opened the floodgates for this kind of interference. First, the court ruled that corporations were citizens, meaning *corporations are people*, and therefore have all of the rights that any of us flesh and blood folks (*who really are people*) would have. Second, it ruled that *money is speech* and restricting monetary contributions is the same as *restricting freedom of speech*.

Furthermore, the court’s ruling stated that there should be *no limits on independent contributions* – contributions not given directly to a candidate or committee – to or from a Super PAC. Initially, there were requirements that all Super PAC activity had to be public: names of contributors, names of recipients, amounts flowing in either direction, etc. Subsequently, those rules have been relaxed and more “dark money” contributions – where donors or recipients are not completely disclosed – have been allowed.

I’m not sure what kind of drugs allowed the court majority to make these amazing intellectual leaps.

The result was essentially unlimited contributions and spending to and from Super PACs. Super PACs are required to act independently of candidate campaigns, but can take actions, as in the case of this postcard, that are clearly designed to boost their favored candidate(s) at the expense of others. I think it's fair to say that, given the politics and resources of the most visible tech billionaires, there's more money spent by Super PACs on the Republican side, especially here in Vermont, but Democrats have their share as well.

Wait, Now It's Getting Personal!

This week I opened my text messages and saw that I had received a "candidate survey" listing me and the other two candidates for Bennington-5 (Mike Nigro and Mary Morrissey) and asking recipients to respond with the two candidates they were most likely to vote for. The same message was also sent to voters in the Bennington-4 district, listing the four candidates there. (I also received that one, so their voter selection needs some improvement, as I have never lived in that district.) In both cases, the Republican candidates were listed first, and their example reply listed the Republican candidates first, which I am sure was not an attempt to influence answers!

This survey was ostensibly paid for by "VTGOP" – the Vermont Republican Party. My guess is that it's designed to develop a "hit list" – identifying the leading Democratic candidates for later attacks. It will be interesting to see if I am correct, in which case you can expect to see further postcards vilifying Democratic candidates – possibly me! It will be *very* interesting to see if *those attacks* come directly from the Republican party, their candidates, or another Super PAC spending dark money.

My Position on Donations

I have not explicitly said this, so let me do it now: I will not accept donations from any corporation, PAC or Super PAC. If a Super PAC runs ads, sends postcards, or takes any other action supposedly on my behalf, I will disavow that action and publicly request that they immediately stop. Further, I expect the same from my Republican opponent.

A record of donations I have received is available on the Vermont Secretary of State website, so you can check at any time. All of those donations are from individuals – mostly from local voters, and friends and family – and they are mostly \$100 or less. The largest contributions to my campaign are from me.

What is the Answer?

I feel pretty strongly about this. Citizens United is a direct attack on our democracy. It allows individuals and corporations a means to pour literally millions of dollars into political campaigns. There is no requirement that their messaging be accurate or even honest. It allows these often unnamed donors to have more influence than the rest of us. It destroys what is left of the ability we all have to participate in the political process by allowing the wealthy, especially the ultra-wealthy, to have an outsized voice.

Instead of promoting free speech, the Supreme Court has given a huge voice to the wealthy, effectively reducing our voices – the voices of the working class, the middle class and the poor, the voices of you and me – in the process.

The answer may lie in recent actions by the State of Hawaii. Their Act 11, passed by the legislature and signed into law by their governor is an attempt to counter Citizen's United. Corporations are created under state law; Hawaii now declines to grant corporations and other artificial entities the power to spend money or contribute value to influence elections or ballot measures, effectively invalidating Citizens United at the state level. It applies to domestic corporations, LLCs, nonprofits, and out-of-state entities operating within Hawaii.

The bill passed both houses of Hawaii's legislature with bipartisan and nearly unanimous support. It's time for Vermont to do the same.

As a final note, Vermont Governor Phil Scott stated that he would "take money from anyone." Like most politicians who accept funding from corporations and PACs, he undoubtedly claims that such money does not influence his decision making. That "lack of influence" surely had nothing to do with his veto of the data center bill, which would have limited giant data centers in Vermont, or his veto of the health care bill, which would have reduced health insurance costs for

teachers and state employees, who will now face substantial increases in those costs.

The only way to ensure that monetary and other donations don't influence the decisions made by our elected officials is to prevent those donations in the first place. To believe otherwise is beyond naive. If the candidates won't refuse such donations, we need a law to keep them from happening. It's time for Vermont to use the State's ability to control corporations to put limits on campaign spending by the ultra-wealthy.

One More Thing...

If you've read my recent newsletters, you know I have said that I can't change anything in Montpelier on my own. It will be a big help to have other, like-minded people serving with me in the legislature. So this is a plug for my fellow candidate for Bennington-5, Mike Nigro. Mike is a good guy who will support you in the legislature and work with me to bring about meaningful change. Please, when you vote for me, vote for Mike, too!