

Newsletter for Oct 6, 2026 : Investing

Today in History:

1976: In China the Gang of Four, having lost their influence with the death of Mao Zedong, were arrested. Hmm. There might be a lesson in this.

Preparing for the Election:

This week Linda and I (finally!) received our ballots in the mail. I hope that you have as well, or soon will. There are a lot of resources available to research candidates and find those who are most likely to support your point of view and represent you well once elected. A couple of resources that come to mind are ballotpedia.org and vote-USA.org. Vermont Public also has a comprehensive candidate list, as do many special interest groups. Many organizations also have lists of candidates they have endorsed.

For many, if not most, of those sites, the organization behind them contacts candidates and allows them to provide whatever information they deem appropriate. Find one or more to your liking and do your research. Pay special attention to the entries that say “candidate did not respond”, or whose entries contain outdated or inaccurate information, and think hard about whether that is someone you want representing you.

Many candidates have their own websites, FaceBook and Instagram pages, or are otherwise present on social media. A surprising number of candidates do not. Many have not even provided basic information to sites like Ballotpedia or Vote-USA. As a voter, I always found that frustrating. Setting up a website with basic information is easy and inexpensive. These days there is really no excuse for having no web page, or worse, an incomplete or outdated website.

My opinion is that candidates have a responsibility to inform voters. I have to wonder if candidates – who are right now looking for something very important from you: your vote – can’t be bothered to provide you with any information about themselves, how much would they communicate with you once elected? That communication, and the candidate’s obligation to provide it to voters, is truly too important to ignore.

In the coming weeks, voters – that means you! – still have the opportunity to gather information about candidates, share that information with others, and keep interest alive. Make sure that your friends and neighbors are voting – early if possible – and participating in the democratic process. It's too important, especially this year, for anyone to sit this one out.

Speaking of Opportunities...

There are a few upcoming events that you may want to attend. At least one of them will be on CAT-TV live and available on streaming after the fact. Invite your friends to join you in person, or to view them live or streaming on CAT-TV, then talk about what you see and hear. Use that to help you decide who to vote for, up and down the ticket. I hope you'll be voting for me, and for Democrats in general, but the important thing is that you stay informed, and especially that you vote!

Here are some upcoming events you may want to attend:

Thursday October 8: Candidates Forum at the Bennington Fire Station 3rd floor All-purpose room from 6:00–8:00PM and also on CAT-TV. Area candidates for the State House and Senate will discuss issues and answer questions on a range of topics.

Saturday October 10: I'll be holding a Meet & Greet at Haberdasher Wine and Provisions on Main Street in Bennington from 4:00–6:00PM. Haberdasher will also be having a wine tasting and there will be assorted cheeses and other treats available. This will be a good opportunity to get some one-on-one time with me to make sure I hear your questions and concerns!

Saturday October 17: There are two events: the Walloomsac Walk Unsung Heroes/Candidate Walk, which will honor local firefighters and provide an opportunity for everyone to meet candidates for multiple offices. That day is also Bennington's annual Harvest Fest on Main Street. The Bennington County Democrats will have a booth and you'll likely spot other candidates there throughout the day. Both events are a great opportunity to corner your local politicians and ask them the hard questions. They ought to have their answers pretty much nailed down at this point in the campaign, but pay special attention to how well they listen to you!

Investing in the Future

Quick Summary: I like to distinguish between “spending” and “investing”. Both involve dispensing money, but spending only has an immediate effect, while investing pays benefits into the future. There is no better investment than helping young people, from pre-school age on up, prepare themselves for the future. A recent candidate forum sponsored by Building Bright Futures provided an opportunity to explore opportunities, and obstacles, facing children and parents, and where the state should make investments that would provide lifelong benefit to families and the community. In fact, the investment needs to be made by all of us to enable our community to thrive.

On October 3, I participated in a candidate forum sponsored by Building Bright Futures, Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council Network, which brings together families, providers and community leaders to “share local insights, elevate family voice, and identify actionable strategies”. Their goal is to see that every child in Vermont has the opportunity to thrive.

The panel included House and Senate candidates from Bennington County. We explored issues related to families ranging from childcare to family leave and pre-K programs. We also touch upon homelessness and its effect on child development and education. Here are a few high points of the discussion.

Prekindergarten Access

Vermont’s Universal Prekindergarten Education program uses public, private and home-based programs to give 3- and 4-year old children the opportunity to build “social-emotional skills, emotional regulation, cooperation and communication” which has been shown to ease transition to kindergarten and produce stronger educational outcomes over time. Despite the goal of 100% participation, actual rates range from 95% to only 11%. The lower numbers occur in the most rural areas, where access to programs is often constrained by the travel distances required to reach them.

Early Childhood Workforce

Providing a stable, adequately staffed workforce is essential to providing the range of services required for families and children. Those services include child care, health care, dental care and behavioral health services. As with many service sectors in Vermont, staffing shortages and turnover are a barrier, especially in more rural areas. Often, child care providers are among the lowest paid workers. The result is that, even though services are supported and subsidized, availability is often limited.

Housing

Approximately 1500 Vermont children under 13 have experienced homelessness during the 2024-2025 school year. Children need stable housing to thrive. Without it they can experience stresses that have a lasting impact on their development which lasts into adulthood. Further, housing needs to be both affordable and located near other essential services such as child care, schools and transportation.

Economic Security

In the first six months of 2025, 44% of Vermont parents surveyed reported difficulty affording at least one basic need: food, health care, housing, or transportation. Family stability and childhood development are closely connected. Providing paid family and medical leave can add \$3400 in annual income and an 18% increase in the chance that parents are working a year after a child's birth, providing the wage replacement is adequate to meet their needs.

It's Complicated

Each of the above paragraphs came with a question to the candidates, along the lines of "how do we fix this?" Several great minds, including Einstein, Newton, Edison and others have uttered variations on this theme: We don't know 1/10th of 1% about anything. I think that the general consensus among those of us being asked to address that question was in line with those great minds. Somehow, though, feeling that you are in good company doesn't provide much comfort.

How does one see to it that an accepted and established program meets its goal of 100% participation when there are physical barriers (eg., distance and lack of transportation) to that delivery? My answer to that question was, take a model of service delivery that works now in a limited setting (that is, exists here and there) and expand it enough to reduce the distance between delivery points. That “something that works” to my mind is community health centers. We have a model here in Arlington, the Battenkill Valley Community Health Center, that provides primary care, dental care and behavioral health services with payment based on an income-related scale. All we need is a “copy and paste” option to replicate it in every community lacking those services.

Similarly, addressing lack of access to child care and pre-K means expanding the public/private partnerships, providing training for staff and additional support services, including transportation, to put everyone within a reasonable distance of the services they need.

Employers benefit from a stable workforce. If a parent needs to quit their job to care for a child (because no other option for care exists, and the job doesn’t provide paid leave) both the parent (and child!) and the employer are worse off. Everyone loses. A paid leave of absence, supported by public funding, could help both, especially if one benefit of available paid leave is that the parent can address issues (sick baby) before it becomes serious enough to require even more time off (and possible loss of the job). The parent keeps their job, the employer keeps their employee: everyone wins.

How about early childhood workforce development? For this I would propose a program similar to what I have already suggested to address the lack of primary care providers: identify promising candidates and pay for their training (certifications or degrees) in return for their promise to work in the area for some number of years. If they work in a public setting, we need to provide them a living wage for the valuable service they provide. If they work in a private setting, we need to ensure the private employer provides wages appropriate to their positions, experience and training. If that private employer receives support from the state or federal government, it should be funded at a level that provides them the ability to pay that wage.

Housing is more problematic. We aren't going to magically create sufficient low cost housing overnight. On the other hand, having people unhoused, especially through a Vermont winter, is unacceptable. (I believe my exact word was "appalling".) Perhaps we need to take an active role in matching young families with older folks who own houses that exceed their current needs. How many seniors, perhaps living alone, perhaps on a fixed income, might find their lives improved by sharing their home with a young family? The senior might help with child care, while the young adults might ensure that the seniors' needs are met. Vermont has a lot of older adults, and a lot of older homes. It's possible we have more resources available than we think we do.

Investment and Community

You've probably heard me say this before, too: one of the things that most attracts me to Vermont is the sense of community. A community doesn't turn its back on those in need. We step up, and we help each other. When an investment is needed, whether it's training doctors or training child care providers, building homes or building health care centers, funding child care in a small town or helping a senior stay in the home they love, we are there. I feel incredibly lucky to be here. That more than any economic factor is why I will stay here. This is my community and I want to help it thrive. To those who have the means, I have to ask: do you feel the same? Is Vermont the community you are willing to invest in?

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!