

Ward 6 NPA November 1, 2012 Meeting Minutes

Facilitator: Rick Bryant

Ward 6 NPA's candidates' forum last Thursday, November 1, included most of the candidates for Chittenden County's six Senate seats as well as House Districts 6-3, 6-5 and 6-6. Moderator Paul Heintz of *Seven Days* asked questions of all candidates and gave the audience an opportunity to ask questions. Mayor Miro Weinberger gave a passionate and clear defense of support for Ballot item 1, 2 and 3. Video is available online at <http://www.cctv.org/watch-tv/programs/burlington-ward-6-npa-meeting-26>

Mayor Weinberger said that the ballot initiatives build on the progress he has made to improve Burlington's financial standing. With recent downgrades in the city's bond rating, it is increasing expensive to borrow the funds needed to cover operating costs. **The Fiscal Stability Bond (Ballot item #1)** is supported by 13 City Councilors (including our two) and will restructure expensive short term debt into less costly Long Term debt. Councilor Norm Blais explained that passage of this item needs a yes from two-thirds of the voters – a "high threshold". Councilor Karen Paul said "it absolutely must pass."

Ballot Item #2 is often misunderstood due to the complexity of Tax Increment Financing. In this case the **TIF district** is Burlington's waterfront and the city knows that there is enough revenue from the waterfront to pay back \$12 million in borrowing and the ballot item is only asking for \$6 million. According to the Mayor "this TIF over the past 20 years has generated far more revenue than the investment made."

Ballot item #3 is requesting a permanent ½ penny for **Bike Path maintenance**. The Mayor said that the city "has not consistently taken care of the Bike Path over its history". The impact on property taxes is about \$1 per month on a \$250,000 house. The Mayor will return to our NPA in January for a longer visit to review his actions since taking office and his plans for the future

Chittenden County Senate Candidates

Moderator Paul Heintz of *Seven Days* asked each candidate to describe in 3 minutes what they hope to do for Burlington and what makes them different from the other candidates. For the most accurate coverage, please view our meeting at <http://www.cctv.org/watch-tv/programs/burlington-ward-6-npa-meeting-26>. Senate candidates at the NPA were (in order of presentations): Tim Ashe, Bob Kiss, Diane Snelling, Philip Baruth, Debbie Ingram, Larkin Forney, Sally Fox, David Zuckerman, Robert Letovsky, Ginny Lyons, and Terry Jeroloman.

Following the introductory remarks Heintz asked if the money coming in to state elections from one Super PAC is a problem and if there are any remedies.

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Ginny Lyons has worked with a Harvard professor to craft a campaign finance bill that would be acceptable to the Supreme Court, but noted that PACs cannot be banned outright.

Robert Letovsky said the greater concern is the negativity in campaigns once Super PACs get involved.

Philip Baruth said that the local Super PAC has not entered the Chittenden race, but has been involved in Franklin County; he predicted it would be involved in Chittenden County in 2 years.

Ward 6 NPA Steering Committee member Neil Groberg asked if there is a difference between governance and running for election; should there be a longer term in office for the governor?

Tim Ashe responded that there is a strong attitude that voters should be able to “check in” every two years, but noted that gubernatorial candidate Randy Brock had introduced a 4-year term.

Bob Kiss said he’d always supported a 2-year term, but found that 3 year terms as Mayor “worked pretty well.” He also said that once incumbents have been re-elected to a second term they often continue to be re-elected.

Moderator Paul Heintz asked how health care reform should be financed.

David Zuckerman, “a small business owner without health insurance”, he supports universal health care and is interested in a combination of payroll tax and taxing wealthy Vermonters.

Terry Jeroloman supports a graduated income tax and described his positive experience with health care while living in Canada.

Sally Fox said that in her assignments to the Health & Welfare Committee she looks at the “skeletal plan” and on the Finance Committee she looks at raising revenues and regulating the insurance industry. She said that the Hsaio Report recommended partial financing by payroll tax plus taking advantage of Affordable Care Act tax credits.

Robert Ullrich of Charlotte asked both Senate and House candidates if they would work towards passage of a Death with Dignity law. Senate candidates who support it: Lyons, Snelling, Baruth, Ingram, Fox, Jeroloman, Forney, Ashe. Bob Kiss said that he has reservations until he is assured there is adequate palliative care and access to hospice and that people have comprehensive medical care so that vulnerable adults are not put in difficult positions. Robert Letovsky prefers to deal with the tax base first and agreed with Bob Kiss on having reservations.

It was not easy to get a single “primary objective” out of the Senate candidates, but the first stated objective from each candidate was:

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Ashe: Comprehensive economic development bill that democratizes economic development
Letovsky: his Vermont Economic Security Act
Kiss: single payer universal health care
Forney: lower corporate and business taxes
Jeroloman: tax reform for a more graduated tax system
Fox: fair budget that addresses needs of all Vermonters
Zuckerman: Universal Health Care
Ingram: health care reform
Baruth: labeling genetically modified food
Snelling: Budget – make sure it is fair and compassionate
Lyons: thermal efficiency and fuel diversification to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Candidates for Vermont House of Representatives

Candidates were given 2 minutes for opening statements – please view the film at www.cctv.org for the most accurate representation of the candidates' remarks.

District 6-3: Gene Bergman, Kit Andrews, Curt McCormack and Jill Krowinsky (incumbent)

District 6-5: Suzi Wizowaty and Joey Donovan (incumbents, unopposed)

District 6-6: Barbara Rachelson

The same Death with Dignity question was asked of the House candidates:

Those supporting it: Wizowaty, McCormack, Krowinski, Rachelson, and Bergman.

Donovan voted against it initially because it was poorly written, leading to concerns about palliative care and hospice. She remains undecided and hopes new legislation is better written. Andrews supports it unless bill is badly written

Moderator Heintz asked the four candidates in the District 6-3 race if there are any real ideological distinctions between Progressives and Democrats. McCormack said that the differences are mainly strategic, not on watershed issues. Krowinski noted that she and Curt McCormack are running also as Working Families Party and that party politics are not representative of their community. Kit Andrews said that while ideas are very similar Progressives will push issues to the forefront of debates. Gene Bergman noted that always being in the minority requires working across party boundaries.

Additional comments on the candidates' focus in the upcoming legislative session:

Rachelson: Education is the key to getting people out of poverty; higher education is too expensive; need to find ways to keep people in Vermont with loan forgiveness.

Wizowaty: will continue to work on criminal justice issues. People at the bottom in Vermont are those in jail or coming out of jail who are subjected to hundreds of

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“collateral consequences” which is described as “civil death”. She wants to make the consequences imposed on criminals case specific to remove some of the obstacles to re-integration to society.

Donovan: Will focus on the achievement gap: “we can’t just allow children to fail”. She wants to lift the moratorium on school construction, noting that the BHS library is “an embarrassment.” Also paid family leave would help keep children from attending school when they are sick.

The meeting began with a short report from **Burlington School District Commissioners** Alan Matson and Jill Evans, who noted that since last spring’s “noise” regarding issues of inclusion the board has made “a lot of progress” writing policy to address the issues. Alan said that the school has been pushed to look at student outcomes and that reporting data is available online.

Brooke Fifield, Director of Public Relations for **Champlain College’s** Student Government Association described some of the efforts being made to improve relationships between students and resident neighbors, including limiting noise, taxi punch cards for student use and community trash pick up programs. Lainey Rappaport requested help for elderly and low income residents with computers; Brooke said she would take the request back to the SGA.

Meeting adjourned at about 9:15 pm.

The next Ward 6 NPA meeting will be December 6 at 7 pm at the Green Church hall.
See you then!