

10 Questions for the Candidates for Barre and Northfield

compiled by Mike Dunphy

With primary season already upon us, the residents of Central Vermont are once more given the opportunity to make real difference in their communities by voting. Many candidates in Barre, Berlin, and Northfield are running unopposed but several Democrats are in races to make the ballot in November.

In Northfield, four candidates—Gordon Bock, Denise MacMartin, John Stevens,

and Jeremy Hansen—are vying for two positions on the ballot, while in Barre, two spots are open to three contenders: Tommy Walz, Peter Anthony, and Paul Flint. It is an effort to give them all the opportunity to share their views with the public. *The Bridge* sent each a questionnaire touching on a number of issues important to Vermont. Some responses have been edited for length but not content. Peter Anthony said he was unable to respond. John Stevens never responded.

BARRE CITY (WASHINGTON-3) CANDIDATES

What is one of your top priorities if elected? Why so?

Tommy Walz: To put more money into working Vermonters' pockets.

Paul Flint: To implement in Barre City an instance of the "Brain Barn" project initially proposed during the James Douglas administration in 2008 by the Vermont Software Technology Alliance. Specifically Barre City would be the prototype using the project plan. Why So? Because we need IT, and by IT I mean Information Technology advanced education, research, development and entrepreneurial-ism. Better training and an innovation economy may eliminate the under-employment pandemic in Barre city.

What have you done in the past to help improve Vermont and/or your community? Can you point to any specific accomplishments?

Walz: I was instrumental in passing legislation that required reasonable workplace accommodation for pregnant workers and addressing veterans' issues, especially suicides.

Flint: In my student days at Windham College (Now Landmark), I became general manager and chief engineer of WVUS 88.9 FM Putney. Since I washed up again on the shores of Vermont 12 years ago, I have become a justice of the peace, a Vermont Department of Labor IBM VSE System Administrator, and then a labor organizer

Do you support the governor's efforts to change the staff-student ratio at Vermont schools. If so, why? If not, what is a policy you would support or lead to improve Vermont schools?

Walz: No, I do not support the governor's staffing proposals. First, every community's educational needs are different, and to say there is one formula that works for all makes no sense. It also takes more local control away from school boards and local voters.

Flint: I believe that Phil sees aspects of unfunded mandates in the rules and



TOMMY WALZ

regulations that created such surreal and expensive staff-student ratios. Unfunded mandates are bad government. The devil is in the details. Set some aspect of state participation (for instance Information Technology support) based upon improvement in the staff-student ratio.

Are you satisfied with the state's efforts to encourage youth to remain in state and immigrants to move to the state? How could it be improved?

Walz: We can do more to encourage young families to come to and stay in Vermont. Reducing student debt, creating more affordable housing and creating better-paying jobs would all help.

Flint: Possibly the worst bit of law I ever saw. 10K\$ to move in? A withholding tax credit to companies who have remote employees in Vermont. Use Tax policy whenever possible. Train them at the local Brain Barn!

Do you support stronger gun regulations than already exist in Vermont? If so, what's an example?

Walz: I think we need to evaluate the effect of the gun safety legislation we passed in the last session before talking about new legislation. The goal is to make Vermont safer.

Flint: For the answer to this question, please see Article II of the U.S. Constitution



PAUL FLINT

As a politician, how do you plan to build consensus with the other parties in the government and not bring Vermont politics into something like the tribal warfare of Washington DC?

Walz: Montpelier is not Washington. I frequently ask representatives from the other parties what they think about a particular issue. A good idea is a good idea, no matter who comes up with it.

Flint: As I was born and raised in DC. Vermont has nothing like the tribal warfare not to mention the blatant corruption of DC. Rather Vermont Politics is all about the almost subliminal "scratch and tickle" corruption of an old and slightly stinky form of political complacency.

Nearly one in five Vermonters are 65 years old or more. How better can Vermont support their needs, particularly with housing and transportation?

Walz: In the past budget we increased the social security exemption in the Vermont income tax. I would like to expand that exemption. There is a dire shortage of affordable housing; we are making a dent in that area, but I want to see programs that create more affordable housing. Transportation is a problem in a rural state. We can help by providing more bus routes, and in certain corridors, rail makes sense.

Flint: Let's start with transportation: buses must run on weekends. David Blittersdorf's AllEarthRail Regional Rail System needs to start at the Williston Industrial park in Barre Town and run to Burlington Station on a seven-day schedule. Vermont needs a "Complete Streets" program. Complete Streets include: 1. Pedestrian Accommodation 2. Bicycle and Alternative (ATV) facilities. 3. Pothole-free automotive surfaces. Now, on to housing. You cannot have housing without income, and you cannot have income without inexpensive and ubiquitous transportation as detailed above. Could the Brain Barn Project

train and accommodate the Aging Vermont population above the national geriatric?

Do you support a fully taxed and regulated market for marijuana, the status quo, or a reversal or tightening of the law?

Walz: I am in favor of taxation and regulation, and I think we can learn from those states that have already gone that route. We still need to deal with the questions of edibles and impaired driving.

Flint: I believe that in passing VSA H.511, Vermont as a state allowed for the laissez-faire decriminalization. From a commercial point of view, the current vacuum of viable law and regulation 511 creates is actually an excellent beginning of a vibrant marijuana industry here in Vermont. So dude, let it grow and then figure out how to painlessly tax it.

Can you give an example of a policy or perspective you've evolved on as a result of your conversations and interactions with your constituency?

Walz: A couple of examples. I became convinced of the need for gender-free, single-user bathrooms after hearing the stories of those for whom it was a daily issue of great inconvenience and embarrassment. Another was how often public places are still not accessible to the handicapped.

Flint: One constituent who stops by regularly, always leaves his Styrofoam coffee cup on my porch. I would like to propose that a nickel deposit be placed on Styrofoam cups as well as all water bottles.

How do you assess the state of Vermont's environment? Is the state doing enough to fight the causes and effects of climate change or could it do more?

Walz: We are not doing enough to clean up our waters. I've seen Missisquoi Bay turn into a huge bowl of evil-smelling pea soup, which brings all economic activity there (swimming, fishing, boating) to a halt. We still have not found a consistent funding mechanism to provide the money we need to do the job.

Flint: Thanks to Vermont's venerable Act 250, it's not in bad shape. The question becomes what should Vermont be, the lifeboat or the country club. What we got now is a lifeboat being ruled by a country club. Please point out all of the DOE, NOAA, or EPA research sites and federally funded research going on in Vermont. We do what we can. Vermont's size should allow us to be a petri dish for all manner of innovation. But that is not the case. This I intend to get to the bottom of.

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