

The Bridge

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The Changing of the Guard

A Power Shift at the Vermont State House



Ink wash drawing by Phil Whitman.

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With the coming of a new year—January 2011—Vermont is witnessing a changing political landscape.

Over the past eight years, Vermont has been ruled by a divided government split between Republican governor Jim Douglas and a Democratic legislature. With the general election last November, Democrat Peter Shumlin becomes the state's new governor and, with the legislature controlled by Democrats, the state affairs will be firmly in the hands of a single party.

In this issue, we take a look at the shift in power. Featured in this issue are interviews with outgoing Governor Douglas and incoming Governor Shumlin. We have also interviewed Vermont Senate newcomer Anthony Pollina and Montpelier's representatives in the Vermont House, Warren Kitzmiller and Mary Hooper. Longtime Washington County senator Bill Doyle provides a revealing account of Vermont legislative history.

Health & Wellness Issue Coming January 20

This issue will feature stories about alternative medicine, women's health, physical fitness, prevention of domestic violence and more.

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Governor Peter Shumlin Lays Out Hard-Driving Agenda

Editor's note: Nat Frothingham from The Bridge interviewed then governor-elect Peter Shumlin in Montpelier on December 22. The following is an edited version of the interview.

Frothingham put all of his questions on the table before the interview began:

- **What are your priorities?**
- **What obstacles will you be facing as you pursue your priorities?**
- **Can you talk about your vision for Vermont's future? What will Vermont look like in four or six or 10 years?**
- **Can you talk about the Douglas administration and how your administration will be different?**

It's my belief that whether I got elected or Brian Dubie got elected, we have the clearest idea of what Vermonters want from their government and what Vermont needs. I say this after having spent literally every day since we adjourned—14 to 16 hours a day—talking to Vermonters. And the overriding message from the middle class and working Vermonters and poor Vermonters is that they don't want another pay cut. They're afraid they're going to lose their jobs. They're afraid they're not going to be able to pay their mortgages, or send their kids to college.

Their biggest fear, Nat, is that they're afraid that their kids won't have the better life they want for them. My dad was the first to go to college in my family because he fought in World War II and he was on the GI bill and he got an education. My mom was the first to go to college in her family. They both created a much better life than their parents had. Those were the expectations of how to do it in America.

So what are the opportunities? I am really bullish about Vermont's job future, being a Vermonter who built a small business in Vermont and, with luck, succeeded in doing that. I understand that government doesn't create jobs. So this is how I see Vermont going forward eight or 10 or frankly, hope-

fully, in three or four years.

There are huge opportunities economically, as you get off of oil and move to other resources, other ways of powering the earth. And we have to do that.

Climate change is absolutely the most important moral imperative that we have. If we don't move quickly to get off of oil, our grandkids' future will be unthinkably difficult and perhaps horrid. If you disagree with me on that, and some do, let's agree on this. I believe that \$70 per barrel oil is over. We're now burning more oil than we can grow. And if you look at how quickly Asia and India are building cars, at a rate that they used to build bicycles, that demand is going to continue at the same time that supply decreases, and we all know what that means.

So there's the opportunity for Vermont. If we get a small sliver of the economic engine that's going to transform this society from an oil-based culture to other ways of doing things, we have no question that we'll have jobs for Vermonters and jobs for our kids. So what are those? I think Vermont has a really bright manufacturing future. Some people will disagree with that. Let's put it this way: Any major (industrial and/or technology) change has come from America—whether it was the Industrial Revolution and the jobs that came from that, whether it was the tech boom and the jobs that came from that.

Let's take this local example. You go to Brattleboro and go to Omega Optical at Delta Business Campus. You drive into that road. It used to be a junkyard where I could get parts for my 1952 Dodge flathead 6. That's where I got the fenders. That's where I got the lights. That's where I got the head. A brook ran through that junkyard and all the oil and antifreeze ran into that brook. That's the way it was when I was a kid

You look at it now. Bob Johnson, who graduated from Marlboro College, developed lenses . . . [for] big telescopes. He had a vision for a net-energy business campus. You now drive up that country road and there are four or five zero-energy houses lived in by employees who work there. On



Peter Shumlin. Photo courtesy of Peter Shumlin's office.

their plant: 200 jobs in manufacturing yogurt right there.

With the whey from that yogurt, they're building an energy-efficient plant at the top of the campus. And with the energy from the whey from that yogurt, from the waste from that yogurt process, they're going to make power. And what are they going to do with that power? Using a new technology for 3-D glasses, Omega will be manufacturing 3-D glasses from the energy of the whey from that yogurt. They're going to manufacture those in Brattleboro, Vermont. And what's the market? He said it was \$100 million. Well, what if it's only half of that?

[Shumlin goes on to cite such new-tech Vermont manufacturers as Northern Power (windmills), David Littleboro (solar tractors), groSolar in White River Junction (residential and commercial applications).]

We have a great agricultural future. A lot of people say, "Shumlin, what are you talking about? Our farmers are going out." I say, "No, actually they're going to be coming in." If we can get our farmers a value-added price for their product, if we can grow the buy local movement, if we can drive with more marketing effort and more planning and more resources in our infrastructure, the job opportunities in both feeding our local restaurants, marketing Vermont food out of state, and expand our notion of local to everything within 200 miles, which is Boston, Montreal, New York, I say we have a bright ag future.

The third piece is renewable energy. No question that's a place where Vermont can be at the forefront—not just producing renewable energy for Vermont, but manufacturing the components for renewables and shipping them out of here, as we're doing with critical components for electric car engines.

The fourth example is efficiency. I think Vermont can be the efficient state that shows the rest of the country how to conserve the power and the oil that we have.

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the left, a huge factory is going in called Commonwealth Yogurt. They're going to manufacture yogurt in that plant. Who is Commonwealth Yogurt? That's a German company that makes an unusual yogurt. They wanted the Vermont label, I suspect, on their yogurt. So what did they do? They drove up Route 91. They hit Vermont. They said, "This looks good." Then the first two towns they hit were Vernon and Guilford. Well, Vernon had an aging nuclear power plant. So they chose Guilford for building

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P.O. Box 1143, Montpelier, VT 05601
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www.montpelierbridge.com

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Editor & Publisher: Nat Frothingham

Managing Editor: Marsha Barber

Sales Representatives: Carl Campbell, Peter DuBois, Carolyn Grodinsky, Rick McMahan

Graphic Design & Layout: Dana Dwinell-Yardley

Calendar Editor: Dana Dwinell-Yardley

Proofreader: Marisa Keller

Editorial Assistant: Autumn Doherty

Distribution: Kevin Fair, Bob Lincoln, Daniel Renfro

Web Master: Michael Berry

Advertising: For further information about advertising deadlines and rates, contact: 223-5112, ext. 11 (Carolyn and Carl) or ext. 12 (Peter), carolynatthebridge@yahoo.com, ccampbell@montpelierbridge.com or peterdubois@montpelierbridge.com

Editorial: Contact Marsha, 223-5112, ext. 14 or mbarber@montpelierbridge.com, or Nat, 223-5112, ext. 10, or mpbridge@sover.net.

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