

Scott Beck

Vermont House Representative



Greetings and Thank You for the continued honor of serving you in Montpelier! The Legislature enters its third week as of today. Vermont's revenue projections for next fiscal year will be made public this week and next Wednesday the Governor will deliver his budget address.

There are several priorities in Montpelier this year that I feel are important and need to be addressed, some of the more pressing: school choice, housing, education tax rates and reform, flood recovery, and the budget.

Not surprisingly, legislators from school districts deciding not to provide choice to their children resent school districts that do. Dealing with these antagonists is a full-time job. These people do not understand what problem they are trying to solve, the public school system, or the public tuition system and independent schools. Nevertheless, they seek dramatic change that would completely upend our education ecosystem and not impact their school districts in the slightest. Already, several bills in the Senate and House have been introduced that would prevent independent schools from continuing to accept students using public tuition. The good news is that many others have joined me in opposing those that mean us harm. We meet regularly to develop effective strategies and communication.

Housing affordability and availability is really a crisis. The crux of the problem, I believe, is the cost to construct or renovate. In almost all cases the cost outweighs the value, often significantly. There is no easy fix, but Act 250 reform seems to be a good place to start. Several bills are being debated in the committees of jurisdiction.

Education tax rates are front and center in Montpelier. The Tax Department's Dec. 1 Letter projected that school districts would increase their education spending by 12% (\$205M), forcing an 18.5% increase in education tax rates. These numbers are sobering, but an early projection subject to change. The bad news is that many fear it will be even worse. Due to a 5% homestead property tax cap intended to protect a handful of districts negatively impacted by pupil weighting changes, a large majority of districts have decided to spend above the cap. It is too early to understand the sum of all these decisions, but many fear that an increase of \$205M has grown to a much larger number. By the time you read this Town Report the situation will likely have changed dramatically.

Layered over this discussion about next year's tax rates is a larger conversation about reforming the Education Fund so that it is understandable, more equitable, and slows the growth in education spending to a rate that taxpayers can afford.

Floods in July and December did a significant amount of damage in Vermont. We were fortunate compared to several other Vermont communities. Montpelier and Barre were especially impacted. Vermont needs to assist those that have yet to receive assistance wherever in Vermont they may live and prepare for the next flooding event, and hopefully avoid it. There seems to be a lot of interest around using a flood bond like what was done after the Flood of 1927. Discussions are ongoing.

This year's budget is shaping up to be very tight, maybe tighter than any passed in recent memory. The reality is that Vermont's economy and revenue increases are again at about 2.0-2.5%, but government pressures are growing at about 3.0-3.5%. Obviously, this is not a sustainable path, and something must give. I am committed to finding efficiencies and reducing spending in programs that underperform without increasing taxes and fees. This is a difficult process, but we must do this to continue with Vermont's longstanding commitment to balance the budget.

The most important job a representative does is listen. Please do not hesitate to reach out to share your ideas. I can be reached at sbeck@leg.state.vt.us or 802.274.0201. I am also available (really prefer) to meet in person. Please reach out!

Respectfully, Rep. Scott Beck