

As a full-time Vermonter for 20+ years, volunteer community activist for 50+ years, retired solar energy professional, grandmother, and resident of planet Earth, I urge you to consider my comments below. You have a significant responsibility as Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Service, and I sincerely appreciate you taking time to read the following.

Responsibilities of Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Service

“The **Commissioner of Vermont's Public Service Department** is responsible for representing the *public interest in matters related to energy*, telecommunications, water, and wastewater. The Commissioner's role includes:

- Advocating for the public's needs in these areas.
- Implementing policies and programs that ensure efficient, reliable, and *sustainable services*.
- *Collaborating with various stakeholders* to enhance quality of life and economic security for Vermont residents.
- Leading initiatives that promote ***ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND PRACTICES and CONSUMER PROTECTION***”

“Climate Change is a ... Code Red for Humanity. The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable,”

---- 2021 report by the IPCC

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Note that the preceding UN IPCC statement was made in **2021**, 5 years and 30 ppm of increased atmospheric carbon levels ago. (So much for heeding the calls of a Code Red condition!) For two decades, I have strongly recommended that Vermont reprioritize our energy goals and strategies, because Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan does not come close to achieving a meaningful impact in reduction of atmospheric carbon levels, nor in supporting goals of sustainability. Most peoples' impression is that Vermont is making laudable progress toward carbon reduction. The DPS, PUC, and utilities are great at public relations, continually patting themselves on the backs for energy conservation and low electric rates. The reality is not at all laudable.

Vermont's utilities claim they have already met state mandated renewable energy goals by claiming that hydro-electric power is carbon-free. As you know, significant methane is emitted from manmade reservoirs, *plus* dam construction causes catastrophic ecological damage and displaces indigenous people. Another gimmick used by Vermont utilities is to purchase REC's from out-of-state sources. These strategies are legal, quick-fix manipulations to make people believe that Vermont has done everything we need to do to meet our state

mandated renewable energy goals. The DPS is allowing our utilities to mislead the public.

I understand that it is vital to keep electricity rates affordable for low- and middle-income households. I do not support making it financially impossible for “ordinary” folks to live here. I am certain that great minds in Montpelier host brain-storming strategy sessions to figure out how to keep electric rates low, simultaneously while supporting the adoption of new solar by residents and businesses. Possibly, a concept might be that the FOR-PROFIT utility companies take lower profits! It is **UNCONSCIONABLE** that Vermont would kill our own struggling solar industry while enriching utility corporations, that are not owned by Vermonters! Our small state of Vermont is experiencing an annual reduction in population. If you are responsible for putting Vermont solar companies and their employees out of business, some will be forced to relocate to other states.

It is your job to “*Collaborate with various stakeholders* to enhance quality of life and economic security for **Vermont residents.**” You do not collaborate. You dictate! (...After meeting behind closed doors with the biggest stakeholders, some that are out-of-state non-residential wealthy corporations!)

Further, you are charged with “Leading initiatives that promote **ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND PRACTICES and CONSUMER PROTECTION.**” In what universe is it “environmentally sound” to kill Vermont’s solar industry while disincentivizing new solar energy? How are you protecting the Vermont consumer when you are forcing some Vermont consumers to move out of state? A smarter, more responsible approach would be to SOLVE the cost of electricity in Vermont without placing the onus on solar. A lower cost of electricity, plus positive incentives for small-scale solar development would attract more people to move to Vermont. Those two concepts are NOT mutually exclusive! Other states have figured that out.

As a governmental leader, it is your job to think about the impact your decisions will make today and tomorrow, for our state and for the rest of the planet. The crisis of climate change is a *global* disaster! If Vermont would develop more rooftop solar power so that we would need less hydro-power from across the border, that (so-called) hydro-renewable energy could be utilized by one of our coal-powered neighboring states.

Since 2008, I have seen Vermont move from being one of the highest-ranking states that incentivize new solar to being an embarrassment. Vermont’s incentive program ranks below the climate-disastrous states of Florida and Texas! What has happened to the leadership of our state that was historically responsible and green?

Support for new net-metered solar by the state of Vermont has dwindled down to much less than nothing. Utilities now charge substantial fees to install new solar and Vermont has a net-metering surcharge.

The challenge to the development of rooftop and small ground-mounted solar in Vermont is that the Public Utility Commission has been too successfully lobbied by Green Mountain Power. The PUC is convinced that ratepayers cannot afford net-metering. I completely disagree with this argument because we, as Vermonters and fellow citizens of planet Earth, cannot be squabbling about money when life on this planet is being threatened by global warming. Are we really so concerned that a utility corporation may need to reduce its profit margin? Or, that our state government may need to subsidize net-metering?

A smart energy policy will strengthen our Vermont economy. By encouraging locally conserved, locally generated, locally made, and locally harvested renewable energy, Vermont will set an example for other states to follow. We can establish a non-carbon based, energy-independent, healthy economy.

Global warming is not a profitability problem – it is a GLOBAL DISASTER, and it is happening right before our eyes! The United Nations called a “Code Red for Humanity!” Why are we arguing about who is going to pay for remedies to stop this catastrophe?

Global warming is the biggest threat to life on our planet; nothing outranks it! Our species, and all species on earth, are facing imminent danger and we need to stop wondering who is going to pay to eliminate the threat. It’s as if a huge comet were hurdling toward earth. To be more correct, it’s not “as if” ... The comet “Homo sapiens” has already crashed on earth. We are in the middle of the Anthropocene epoch, the Sixth Extinction.

But, here’s the very good news – we Sapiens actually CAN control the impact of this particular comet! We CAN make drastic changes to our way of life and our ways of thinking about money. We CAN take action. I hope Vermont will choose to become a leader in the revolution that must happen. We *can* be a brave little state! We can say “NO” to corporate greed! We can figure out ways to help people install net-metered solar power on EVERY rooftop while protecting low- and moderate-income rate-payers!

We have the brains, technology, resources, and the know-how to achieve our energy goals. All we need is the political will, regardless of political party affiliation.

Kerrick Johnson, Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Service, it is up to YOU to protect the people of Vermont. Please do not put wealthy utility corporations before Vermonters.

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