

Journal
of the
JOINT ASSEMBLY
Biennial Session
2025

**JOURNAL OF THE JOINT ASSEMBLY
of the
STATE OF VERMONT
BIENNIAL SESSION, 2025**

IN JOINT ASSEMBLY, January 9, 2025

10:00 A.M.

The Senate and the House of Representatives met in the Hall of the House of Representatives pursuant to a Joint Resolution which was read by the Clerk and is as follows:

J.R.S. 2. Joint resolution to provide for a Joint Assembly to receive the report of the committee appointed to canvass votes for state officers.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the two Houses meet in Joint Assembly on Thursday, January 9, 2025, at ten o'clock in the forenoon to receive the report of the Joint Canvassing Committee appointed to canvass votes for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, Auditor of Accounts and Attorney General, and if it shall be declared by said Committee that there had been no election by the voters of any of said state officers, then to proceed forthwith to elect such officers as have not been elected by the voters.

Presiding Officer

Philip E. Baruth, President *Pro Tempore* of the Senate, in the Chair.

Clerk

John H. Bloomer, Jr., Secretary of the Senate, Clerk.

Report of the Joint Canvassing Committee

Senator Hardy, Co-Chair, then presented the report of the Joint Canvassing Committee, which was as follows:

The Joint Canvassing Committee appointed to canvass the votes for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, Auditor of Accounts, and Attorney General respectfully reports:

That having been duly sworn, it has attended to the duties of its trust and finds the number of votes to have been:

For GOVERNOR.....	362,841
Necessary to have a major part of the votes.....	181,421
Esther Charlestin, Democratic/Progressive.....	79,217
June Goodband, Peace and Justice.....	4,512
Kevin Hoyt, Independent.....	9,368
Eli "Poa" Mutino, Independent.....	2,414
Philip B. Scott, Republican.....	266,439
Scattering (write-in votes).....	891

Pursuant to the Constitution of the State of Vermont, the Committee hereby declares that

PHILIP B. SCOTT

received a major part of the votes, and therefore was elected Governor of the State of Vermont for the two years next ensuing.

For LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR.....	352,414
Necessary to have a major part of the votes.....	176,208
Ian G. Diamonstone, Peace and Justice.....	13,671
John S. Rodgers, Republican.....	171,854
David E. Zuckerman, Progressive/Democratic.....	165,876
Scattering (write-in votes).....	1,013

And agreeable to the Constitutional provisions, it hereby declares that no person has received the major part of the votes cast for Lieutenant Governor, and that there is no election for Lieutenant Governor by the voters.

For STATE TREASURER.....	347,312
Necessary to have a major part of the votes.....	173,657
Joshua Bechhoefer, Republican.....	135,763
Michael S. Pieciak, Democratic.....	211,134
Scattering (write-in votes).....	415

Pursuant to the Constitution of the State of Vermont, the Committee hereby declares that

MICHAEL S. PIECIAK

received a major part of the votes, and therefore was elected Treasurer of the State of Vermont for the two years next ensuing.

For SECRETARY OF STATE.....	344,524
Plurality, not a major part of the vote, is required	
Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Democratic.....	205,378
H. Brooke Paige, Republican.....	138,673
Scattering (write-in votes).....	473

Pursuant to the Constitution of the State of Vermont, the Committee hereby declares that

SARAH COPELAND HANZAS

received the greatest number of the votes, and therefore was elected Secretary of State of the State of Vermont for the two years next ensuing.

For AUDITOR OF ACCOUNTS.....	341,793
Plurality, not a major part of the vote, is required	
Douglas R. Hoffer, Democratic/Progressive.....	207,195
H. Brooke Paige, Republican.....	134,066
Scattering (write-in votes).....	532

Pursuant to the Constitution of the State of Vermont, the Committee hereby declares that

DOUGLAS R. HOFFER

received the greatest number of the votes, and therefore was elected Auditor of Accounts of the State of Vermont for the two years next ensuing.

For ATTORNEY GENERAL.....	347,158
Plurality, not a major part of the vote, is required	
Charity R. Clark, Democratic.....	200,711
Kevin Gustafson, Peace and Justice.....	17,159
Ture Nelson, Republican.....	128,798
Scattering (write-in votes).....	490

Pursuant to 3 V.S.A. §151, the Committee hereby declares that

CHARITY R. CLARK

received the greatest number of the votes, and therefore was elected Attorney General of the State of Vermont for the two years next ensuing.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

RUTH ELLEN HARDY

Chair of the Joint Canvassing
Committee on the part of the Senate

MATTHEW BIRONG

Chair of the Joint Canvassing
Committee on the part of the House

Report of the Joint Canvassing Committee Adopted

Upon motion of Representative Birong, Co-Chair, the report of the Joint Canvassing Committee was adopted.

Statement by Presiding Officer

The report of the Joint Canvassing Committee which was just adopted by this Joint Assembly declares that no person was elected to the Office of Lieutenant Governor, since a majority vote was not attained as required by the Vermont Constitution.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Joint Resolution which set up this Joint Assembly (J.R.S. 2.) and the provisions of the Vermont Constitution, we will now proceed to the election of the Lieutenant Governor.

Under the provisions of the Constitution, chapter II, section 47, the voting for this office is to be done by joint ballot of this Assembly, for the *three* candidates for the office who receive the greater numbers of votes for that particular office.

Accordingly, for the office of Lieutenant Governor you must choose among:

Ian G. Diamondstone (Peace and Justice Party)

John S. Rodgers (Republican Party)

David E. Zuckerman (Progressive/Democratic Party)

Tellers Appointed

The Chair appointed the following tellers for the distribution and counting of ballots:

Senator Ruth E. Hardy, of Addison District, as chief teller
 Senator Brian P. Collamore, of Rutland District
 Senator Tanya C. Vyhovsky, of Chittenden-Central District
 Representative Matthew Birong, of Vergennes
 Representative Lisa Hango, of Berkshire
 Representative Alice Emmons, of Springfield
 Representative Sandra Pinsonault, of Dorset

Results of Balloting for Lieutenant Governor

The ballots were taken and counted, and the result of the balloting for Lieutenant Governor was as follows:

Total votes cast.....	176
Necessary for election.....	89
Ian G. Diamondstone, Peace and Justice.....	0
John S. Rodgers, Republican.....	158
David E. Zuckerman, Progressive/Democratic.....	18

Whereupon, the Chair declared that

JOHN S. RODGERS

having received the majority of the total votes cast was duly elected to the office of the Lieutenant Governor for the two years next ensuing.

Dissolution

Thereupon, the President declared that the Joint Assembly was dissolved.

JOHN H. BLOOMER, JR.
Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the Joint Assembly

IN JOINT ASSEMBLY, January 9, 2025

2:00 P.M.

The Senate and House of Representatives met in the Hall of the House of Representatives pursuant to a Joint Resolution which was read by the Clerk and is as follows:

J.R.S. 3. Joint resolution to provide for a Joint Assembly to hear the inaugural message of the Governor.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the two Houses meet in Joint Assembly on Thursday, January 9, 2025 at two o'clock in the afternoon to receive the inaugural message of the Governor.

Presiding Officer

Honorable John S. Rodgers, President of the Senate, in the Chair.

Clerk

John H. Bloomer, Jr., Secretary of the Senate, Clerk.

Recognition

The Chair recognized visiting foreign dignitaries and former Governors and their spouses:

Quebec's Delegate to New England, Rene Sylvestre
Canadian Consul General, represented by Lisa Carrier
Governor and Mrs. James H. Douglas
Governor Madeline M. Kunin
Governor Peter E. Shumlin and Katie Hunt

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court was escorted within the presence of the Joint Assembly by the Sergeant at Arms, Agatha Kessler.

Committee Appointed

Senator Philip E. Baruth of Chittenden-Central District moved that a Committee of three Senators and three Representatives be appointed by the Chair to wait upon His Excellency, the Governor-elect, and escort him into the Chamber to receive the Oath of Office and to present his inaugural address.

Which was agreed to.

The Chair appointed as members of such Committee:

Senator Baruth, of Chittenden-Central District
Senator Lyons, of Chittenden-Southeast District
Senator Beck, of Caledonia District
Representative Houghton, of Essex Junction
Representative McCoy, of Poultney
Representative Logan, of Burlington

Governor-Elect Scott Presented

The Committee performed the duty assigned to it and appeared within the Chamber, accompanied by His Excellency, Governor-elect Philip B. Scott.

Song

Summer Boutin sang - "Our National Anthem."

Representative Kevin "Coach" Christie - "America the Beautiful"

Invocation

The Reverend Father Leopold J. Bilodeau, retired Pastor of St. Monica's Church, Barre, VT gave the official invocation.

Oath Administered to Governor

The oath of office was then duly administered by the Honorable Paul L. Reiber, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Vermont, to His Excellency, Governor Philip B. Scott.

Oath Administered to Officers

The oath of office was then duly administered by His Excellency, Philip B. Scott, Governor of the State of Vermont, *separately*, and in the order shown below, to the following officers:

Michael S. Pieciak, Treasurer
Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State
Charity R. Clark, Attorney General

Second Invocation

The Rabbi David Fainsilber of the Jewish Community of Greater Stowe, Vermont, gave a second invocation.

Song

Pattie Casey, sang -“These Green Mountains”.

Introduction by Chair

The President of the Senate, Lieutenant Governor John S. Rodgers, then introduced the Governor of the State of Vermont, Philip B. Scott, for the purpose of presentation of his inaugural address.

Inaugural Address

Governor Scott then presented the following remarks.

“Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the General Assembly, Honored Guests, and fellow Vermonters.

“I’m honored to have earned the trust and support of voters to serve, once again, as Governor.

“And it’s great to have former Governors Shumlin, Kunin, and Douglas with us today.

“I want to thank my wife Diana, my daughters, Erica and Rachael, my mom, and my family and friends for their continued understanding of the day-to-day challenges and demands of this job. And that goes for your families as well. Public service is rewarding, but consuming, with a lot of time spent away from home.

“This session, when our work gets difficult and the days grow longer, which they will, let’s remember the hundreds of men and women in our National Guard who are away from their families and far from home. A large number of them were deployed this past week. In fact, last night I met with a group that was leaving and assured them we would do our best to take care of their families while they focused on their mission.

“We are joined today by General Knight and other members of the Guard. So, I’d like to ask them and anyone here who has served in the military to rise and be recognized.

“I also want to acknowledge former legislators we have lost over the last year, who I served with over my 24 years in this building: Bill Keogh, Curt McCormack, Dick Sears, Don Turner, and of course, there was my former

seatmate, Bill Doyle, and my dear friend and mentor, Dick Mazza – all respected, and greatly missed.

“Between Senators Doyle and Mazza, they served 90 years in the legislature.

“One a Republican, the other a Democrat.

“But they had something in common that had nothing to do with power or the influence earned in the hallways of the statehouse. They were both successful because their constituents back home trusted them. Trusted them to do the right thing and not fall into the trap of “red vs. blue.” Trusted them to put the people they represented *first*.

“See, they understood from the start that their job was to bring the perspective of their communities to the statehouse – not the other way around.

“They knew it wasn’t the legislators in this building who elected and re-elected them over those 90 years. So they worked for their constituents, their neighbors, and the folks who turned to them for help.

“When you think about it, that’s really what being a legislator is all about. That’s the job.

“Listening to your constituents and being a voice for those back home is essential. Especially for those of you from cities, towns and villages that feel left behind and want a seat at the table.

“There’s no doubt many communities, businesses, and families are struggling. But it’s not hard to see that Northwest Vermont is doing BETTER than all the others. It’s not to say this region doesn’t have challenges, but, for the most part, it’s where you see a lower percentage of kids in poverty, lower energy costs, higher median incomes, higher home values, and more new housing being built. And while we’re desperate for workers across the state, the size of the workforce in Chittenden and Franklin counties is the highest it’s been in recent history.

“But as the rest of the state struggles to catch up, they carry the same burden of increasing taxes and fees and navigate the same complicated mandates and regulations.

“And regardless of how well intentioned these policies are, they’re expensive and require resources that places like Burlington, Shelburne and Williston may have, but small towns like Chelsea, Lunenburg, Peacham, Plainfield – and even Rutland, Newport and Brattleboro – do not. Too many bills are passed without considering the impact on these communities.

“Let me read a vote explanation from former Essex-Caledonia Representative Terri Lynn Williams, which she gave last year, in tears. She said, “Don’t come up to me today and ask me how I am. The answer is I’m sick, and I’m afraid, and I’m defeated, and angry, and sad. There you have it. Don’t ask. Because you have no idea, or don’t care, what you’re doing to my county, and the other 70% of Vermont.”

“Now, you may not agree with what she said, but we can’t ignore how she feels. And she’s not alone.

“Two years ago, I shared the story of a somewhat angry guy from Essex County, who confronted me while I was in the Northeast Kingdom, saying, we’re crushing him. And that “Montpelier” couldn’t care less about what they did to folks like him, in places like Island Pond.

“Many of you go back home, and face constituents with these same concerns and challenges. Where your workforce and student enrollment has been declining for years. Where your selectboard doesn’t have the time or resources to apply for complicated grants. Where your schoolboard is struggling, and your community needs jobs and a better economy.

“So, if any of this resonates with you, here’s something to think about: There are 17 Senators and 83 House members who represent these left-behind communities. Which means if you ignore party labels, *you* actually have the majority here.

“So let’s work together to pass bills that fix the problems that matter most to *your* constituents and set aside the ones that don’t. Let’s put our communities above all else and reset the playing field so it’s fair and benefits *all* of Vermont.

“Now, let me ask you to think about a time when you’re hunting, mountain biking, driving, or on a hike and you’ve gotten turned around. You somehow got off the trail, took a wrong turn, it starts to get dark, and it hits you: “I went the wrong way.”

“When that happens to me, I stop, get my bearings and get back on course.

“But when it comes to politics, I know it can be hard to admit when you’ve gone down the wrong path and need to turn around. But we’re not here to worry about egos. We’re here to do what Vermonters need. And they just sent a very clear message: They think we’re off course.

“For my first six years as governor, we built budgets that funded our needs, made new investments, and stabilized the State’s finances – all without asking Vermonters for more. This commonsense approach led to historic surpluses so we could invest in the initiatives we care about without raising taxes. It wasn’t always easy, but in the end, we were able to come to an agreement.

“But last biennium things changed, and the Legislature didn’t have to compromise. So they built and passed budgets that met their wants, and then raised taxes and fees as necessary to pay for them.

“In response, Vermonters told us – loudly and clearly – they expect us to get back on course; to spend within THEIR means; and above all else, make Vermont more affordable for *them*.

“Now, you don’t have to take my word for it. Just listen to Travis, a Harwood alum and Moretown resident, who rushed from work to a public meeting so he could tell whoever would listen, “I don’t live here. I survive here.”

“He’s had enough. His taxes and his homeowners’ insurance have doubled. His hands, at that very moment, were bleeding from the 14-hour day he just worked – a schedule that’s crushing him.

“He said, “I’m sick of all this ridiculous spending and the cost of everything doubling every year. I can’t handle it anymore. I’m 46. I don’t know if I’m going to see anything older than that here in Vermont.” Now remember his age because I’ll come back to it.

“He ended his comments with a simple message: “It’s too expensive. Straighten it out. Figure it out. And come up with a better system. Because the taxpayers are sick of it.”

“And that, I believe, gets to the heart of the issue. Because he didn’t say *slash and burn the budget*. He said, *do it better*.

“In so many areas, I share your goals. Where we often disagree is how we get there and at what pace.

“As I’ve said before, just throwing more money at problems hasn’t equaled success. Not in education, state colleges, housing, homelessness, and other areas where we’ve *funded*, but haven’t *fixed* the underlying structural issues. Without fixing the holes we’re in, they just keep getting bigger. And the hard-earned money of taxpayers like Travis, is squandered.

“So this year, I’m asking you to join me; to LISTEN to those who sent us here; think about what they can afford and what they need; and give everyone the chance to not *just* survive, but to thrive.

“There’s no doubt the root cause of our challenges is demographics – especially the size of our working class and number of students, which has been shrinking for decades.

“I know some look at recent data showing a population increase and think we’ve solved the problem. And while it *is* good news, looking at total population doesn’t tell the whole story.

“What does are the numbers 14, 28, and 48: According to the Joint Fiscal Office, from 2010 to 2022 alone, we saw 14,000 fewer Vermonters under the age of 18; 28,000 fewer age 40-54 (which is prime working age – Travis’s age) and 48,000 more over the age 65.

“And here’s why this matters:

“Because it means fewer kids in our schools while we’re still paying for the system built for tens of thousands more students. It leads to fewer high school graduates, which means less enrolling in our state colleges or replacing retirees in the workforce.

“It means fewer in the trades to build the infrastructure and housing we need. Fewer to work at childcare centers and healthcare offices. Fewer volunteering for your local fire department. Fewer joining your police force. Fewer teachers and bus drivers. And fewer to take care of loved ones in our long-term care facilities.

“It also means fewer workers generating state revenue, and NO ONE to fill the jobs employers need to survive or grow.

“All of it means less revenue for services to support the 48,000 more seniors we have, and less to fund a safety net for the most vulnerable.

“With fewer to pay for the growing burden of taxes and fees, education, utilities, and healthcare, Vermont becomes less and less affordable for those still here. And as competition for a limited workforce pushes wages up, *everything* gets more expensive.

“Meanwhile, it gets harder to attract the people we need because our reputation as one of the highest taxed and most expensive states isn’t exactly a great marketing strategy.

“It’s clear: You cannot separate affordability and demographics, so *both* need to be at the center of all we do.

“As I say all the time, we need more taxpayers, not more taxes.

“Housing is a great place to start.

“We know mortgages and rent are unaffordable for many. This cost, and a shortage of units, drives people out of Vermont and prevents families and workers from moving here.

“To me, the issue is obvious, and its solution relies on a basic economic principle: Supply and Demand.

“According to the Housing Needs Assessment, it will take 7,200 homes just to break even. And if we want to grow the workforce beyond what we have today, we need over 8,000 homes a year for the next five years. But our current rate is about 2,300. Now, that’s an improvement over the 1,600 a year we saw over the previous decade. But it’s nowhere near enough.

“So this session, it’s crucial we pass an *actual* housing bill, focused on four strategies:

“First, let’s strengthen our foundation with infrastructure for housing and flood recovery – not just with funding but with a creative expansion of our successful Tax Increment Finance (TIF) program.

“Second, we can give a helping hand to neglected communities by continuing to transform dilapidated houses into homes and economic opportunity.

“Third, we need more people investing in, and revitalizing, working-class neighborhoods. So let’s continue to grow creative programs like the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP) and help more “mom and pop” investors be part of the solution.

“And fourth, if this is truly the crisis we all know it is, let’s treat it like one. In order to make real progress, we must address our appeals process, which has been abused for far too long. And we have a lot more work to do on last year’s land use bill, like expanding the ACT 250 exemptions currently provided to a select few, and giving rural communities a seat at the table, so they too have an opportunity to thrive and grow. As one national housing expert recently put it, it’s long past time to legalize housing.

“More housing plays an important role for another key challenge: Education.

“As you know, last year, property tax bills went up 14% on average – and as high as 38%. And if this year’s projected rate goes into effect, education property taxes will have increased 33%, on average, in just three years.

“And that’s *only* property taxes, which, for good reason, have received a lot of attention. But what’s not as obvious is all that’s been added to the Ed Fund from other sources:

“100% of our Sales and Use tax – about \$600 million a year – goes into the Ed Fund. So does a third of our Purchase & Use tax, and a quarter of our Rooms & Meals tax, as well as 100% of the new short-term rental surcharge and all lottery proceeds.

“And at times, we’ve bought down rates with general fund money that could have gone to housing, human services, climate mitigation, public safety and so much more.

“So when we tell ourselves we pay for education with property taxes, that’s not the whole story. Because over a third – \$800 million – comes from other sources.

“Since I took office, the Education Fund has gone from \$1.6 billion to an astounding \$2.3 billion and climbing. We’re one of the top education spenders in the nation. Yet in too many districts, teachers aren’t paid enough, administrators are tied up in bureaucracy, schools have too much empty space and many are in disrepair, and most importantly, our kids are not seeing the best outcomes.

“With what we’re spending, we should not be in the middle of the pack on *any* educational scorecard, but we are. And our kids should *all* be at grade level in reading and math. But in some grades, less than half hit that mark.

“While educators, administrators, parents and kids are doing their very best to make things work, the statewide system is broken and failing them.

“So what’s causing the problem?”

“First, it’s the way we pay for it (the “funding formula”).

“Forty-eight states set the amount they will spend on education each year. Vermont does not. Here, every school budget is set by school boards, and if local voters pass it, the State is required to pay it – no matter how much it costs.

“Then the state sets the property tax rate, using the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA), grand list, pupil weights, and a bunch of other complicated stuff that few understand. And this is typically done weeks after budgets pass

and months after they're built. So when school boards and voters make their decisions, few know the impact on their property taxes.

"We know there are some communities whose taxpayers can't afford to pay more. So, they keep their spending low in hopes of smaller tax increases. But too often, the communities that have more, can afford more, so they spend more. And those higher spenders can actually increase the rates of those districts whose kids and teachers are getting less.

"Next, we need to take a hard look at how we govern and administer education.

"Put simply, we have a lot of buildings, classrooms, adults, and layers of bureaucracy but fewer and fewer kids and taxpayers.

"Today, we have 83,500 Pre-K–12 students paid for by the Ed Fund. For the 80,000 who are in public schools, we have 52 supervisory unions, 119 districts and 287 individual schools.

"We also have among the very smallest class sizes and schools in the nation, and the very lowest student to teacher and student to staff ratios. Some may think this is a good thing. But the evidence shows that many high performing schools throughout the country are larger with bigger classes and higher ratios.

"The bottom line is our system is out of scale and very expensive. And as obvious as these challenges are, we haven't been able to fix it.

"Efforts like Act 68, Act 46 and Act 127 have fallen short because they tried to tinker with an existing structure that simply doesn't work.

"So let's have the courage to fix the entire system to make it work better for all kids and give them more opportunities from Cradle to Career.

"With my budget in two weeks, we'll share our full proposal to improve the quality, equity and sustainability of the Pre-K–12 system in Vermont. With those three principles – and the mandate voters gave us in November – we'll propose a multi-year plan to transform education.

"First, it will include an entirely new student-centered funding formula to provide more and better opportunities for kids and get costs under control.

"Second, we'll propose a new, simpler governance structure, so we can deliver a better and more equal education across communities.

"Third, we'll provide school boards and administrators with support and guardrails to reduce cost pressures.

“Finally, we know Vermonters can’t afford to pay more. So, if school boards contain spending growth to the projected level, my budget will lower the impact of this year’s increase with a goal to eliminate it.

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“Now, I’m not going to sugarcoat it. None of this will be easy.

“And I’m sure we’ll hear some of the same hesitations and concerns of the past. Here are a few: “We need some schools to consolidate or close, but not our school. We need lower costs, but we won’t share our teacher or principal. We need efficiency, but we want our own school board. We need pay equity, but we want our own employee contract. We need the State’s help, but don’t mess with local control.”

“But all these concerns are more about *adults* than *students*. And failing to fix this problem is failing our kids.

“So let’s be bold. Let’s be the ones who make the difficult decisions to move towards the real, transformative change the system needs and our kids deserve.

“For years I’ve said, if I gave you \$2.3 billion to educate 83,500 students, it would look far different than what we have today.

“This session we have the rare opportunity to not only make our system more affordable for taxpayers but to improve the quality of education for all kids – no matter their challenges or where they live. And we owe it to everyone to seize the moment and be brave, together.

“There are no silver bullets, no simple solutions, to any of this.

“But in a state with so many crises – from demographics and workforce to public safety and disaster resiliency to affordability of government, healthcare, education and the cost of living and doing business – we need to start somewhere.

“I believe prioritizing housing and education – in a way that makes Vermont more affordable, not LESS – is how we make the biggest gains.

“In the coming weeks, we’ll talk about how to stabilize our healthcare system; and share proposals to improve public safety, strengthen communities, and support climate policy that’s achievable *and* affordable.

“So we’ll be juggling a lot of issues, but it’s more important than ever to *prioritize* and stay *focused* on the fundamentals that matter most to Vermonters.

“In a few short months, I’ll be standing right here again as we adjourn the first half of the biennium. Those of you who have been around a while know our time together will be gone in a flash.

“So, on that day, what is it, you want to have done for your community?

“What priorities of theirs will you have addressed?

“I can promise you, my efforts, my focus – and those of my entire administration – will be squarely on solving the problems Vermonters sent me, and all of you, here to solve: Creating a high quality, equitable and sustainable education system; pushing for regulatory changes to legalize housing; and making sure – whatever we do – we keep affordability for everyone our TOP priority.

“Vermonters asked us, very clearly, to separate our wants from our needs and to FIX – not just FUND – issues that have a major impact on their lives.

“I know this is your process. And I know what’s taken up this session – and whether we make progress on these issues or not – is in your hands.

“So, I’m asking each of you to think about what Vermonters will say about our work at the end of the session; to use the time between now and adjournment wisely; to prioritize the issues and perspectives of your constituents; and make sure the concerns of your communities are heard.

“The good news is, we’ve shown what state government can do to solve problems and help people.

“We saw it during the pandemic, and I often think back to what it took to build that response. Long days, nights and weekends that spanned months and then years. But even with all the uncertainty, with all the loss, the hardship, difficult decisions and tough calls – we got through it.

“And with the federal aid that came our way in the aftermath, we have strengthened 246 water treatment systems, supported over 600 businesses, created nearly 2,000 homes, protected 3,500 acres with climate change mitigation projects, and improved broadband for over 100,000 households and businesses. And this money is still funding projects, so there’s more to come.

“We’ve had success on a smaller scale as well:

“A little over a year ago, there was an idea to fold a team from the Agency of Transportation – the folks who build things – into our housing team to make more units available, quickly and affordably. When flood waters damaged

dozens of homes beyond repair for the second year in a row, this group stepped up to say, “we can help.” And in a show of true bipartisanship, the Emergency Board transferred \$7 million to get them started. In a matter of months, they’ve improved 34 empty lots and placed 32 mobile homes with five already under contract for purchase.

“And that’s just one example. Here are a few more:

“We’ve welcomed over 1,000 refugees in the last three years, and we’ll continue to do our part.

“While we’re not claiming victory, overdose and suicide deaths are trending downward. So are highway fatalities and crashes.

“Since October 2021, state funding for brownfields has helped clean up 42 contaminated sites, making way for over 700 new homes – adding economic value for communities after years of being an eye sore.

“Since 2020, our VHIP investments have brought 500 affordable apartments online with almost 500 more under construction. The average grant is about \$36,000, which is a bargain in today’s market.

“State parks welcomed over a million visitors last season – one of our best years ever, despite the flooding.

“VOREC, the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Collaborative, is paying off – contributing \$2.1 billion to our economy in 2023. This puts us second in the nation, after Hawaii.

“We’ve issued hundreds of “Rays of Kindness”, recognizing Vermonters for their everyday good deeds. That includes Mr. G, a teacher in Northfield (whose here today), recognized for his Walking Wednesday group, which has been connecting students to exercise and their community for years.

“To better serve Vermonters, we’ve started the long overdue process of modernizing our 55-year-old unemployment IT infrastructure.

“We’ve completed major projects like the 1,000-foot runway expansion at the Franklin County Airport, which, coupled with the expansion of water and sewer infrastructure, will make Highgate an economic hub.

”We brought train service from Burlington to New York City after two decades of waiting.

“But that’s nothing compared to another *huge* accomplishment in Transportation. Because this year, we had just one truck stuck in Smuggler’s Notch. Now, if we can go from as many as 12 stuckages down to one, we should be able to do most anything.

“Kidding aside, all across the state there are good things happening – large and small – every single day.

“Last year, I talked about the countless Vermonters, leading by example to support their communities in good times and bad.

“It’s something we saw in the summer of 2023 and again in 2024 when flood waters ravaged the state, and Vermonters tapped into that same stubborn sense of community to *once again* help neighbors muck out and clean up.

“But it’s not just about lending a hand. It’s the genuine concern for others – the selflessness – that sets us apart.

“About a month after this year’s flood, me and my team were in Lyndonville, talking with the town about their many challenges. With back-to-back floods, the local teams were exhausted; the Northeast Kingdom’s two-person Long Term Recovery Group was struggling to keep up with all the need; the selectboard was piecing together funding to cover costs; and they were all spread too thin.

“But what struck me – and has stuck with me – was something one of the local homeowners said. Carrie, and her husband Nathan, gave us a glimpse of life on Brook Road, which – along with Red Village Road – saw some of the worst damage and left many – them included – on an island in their own homes.

“Since they couldn’t drive in or out, they had to walk one kid up the road, and the other down, to get them to school. Family members were carrying in groceries on foot and as their generator was running low, they were trying to figure out how to get fuel.

“But Carrie wasn’t sharing this story to complain. Her point – her concern – was not about her family or even the challenges of her town. She said, “I’m just worried about the folks up in Kirby.” Because even with all Lyndon’s struggles, she knew they had more resources than their smaller neighbor.

“*This* is the selflessness – *this* is the stubborn sense of community – that inspires me to do the work to make the lives of these Vermonters and *all* Vermonters easier, and better, every day.

“My friends – whether it’s putting the needs of your neighbors ahead of your own significant challenges, leaving your family for months to protect democracy around the world, or being a trusted and honest voice for your community for decades – the examples are there for us. We just need to learn from them.

“This year, we’ve once again been asked to step up, solve big problems and help people. And there’s no doubt our challenges are great. But if we meet them head on – accept reality but refuse to settle for it – I know, when this session comes to a close, we will be able to go back to our communities with our heads held high, proud of the work we did here.

“We will go home with a renewed sense of duty, and hope for the brighter future that all Vermonters deserve. That’s what they asked us to do. And we cannot – and must not – let them down.

“Thank you.”

John H. Bloomer, Jr.
Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the Joint Assembly

Dissolution

The Governor, having completed his inaugural message, was escorted from the Hall by the Committee.

The Supreme Court was escorted from the Hall by the Sergeant at Arms.

There being no further business, the President declared the Joint Assembly to be dissolved.

IN JOINT ASSEMBLY, January 28, 2025

1:00 P.M.

The Senate and House of Representatives met in the Hall of the House of Representatives pursuant to a joint resolution which was read by the Clerk and is as follows:

J.R.S. 7. Joint resolution to provide for a Joint Assembly to hear the budget message of the Governor.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the two Houses meet in Joint Assembly on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at one o'clock in the afternoon to receive the budget message of the Governor.

Presiding Officer

Honorable John S. Rodgers, President of the Senate, in the Chair.

Clerk

Melissa R. Gradel, Assistant Secretary of the Senate, Clerk.

Committee Appointed

Senator Philip E. Baruth of Chittenden-Central District moved that a Committee of three Senators and three Representatives be appointed by the Chair to wait upon His Excellency, the Governor of the State of Vermont, to inform him that the Joint Assembly is now convened and to escort the Governor to the Chamber to deliver his budget message.

Which was agreed to.

The Chair appointed as members of the Committee:

Senator Andrew J. Perchlik, Washington District
Senator Ann E. Cummings, of Washington District
Senator Virginia V. Lyons, of Chittenden-Southeast District
Representative Robin P. Scheu, of Middlebury
Representative Emilie K. Kornheiser, of Brattleboro
Representative James F. Harrison, of Chittenden

The Committee performed the duty assigned to it and appeared within the Joint Assembly accompanied by His Excellency, Governor Philip B. Scott, who delivered the following message.

Governor's Budget Message

“Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Members of the General Assembly, Honored Guests and fellow Vermonters:

“In my inaugural address, I spoke about colleagues and neighbors whose accomplishments and service are there for us to learn from.

“On Sunday, I had the honor of joining UVM President Prelock, the Mayor of Burlington, many faculty members past and present, and thousands – and I mean thousands – of Vermonters, young and old, to celebrate the UVM men's soccer team and their National Championship.

“I have to say, I was blown away by the turnout and enthusiasm. Jeff Schulman and Krista Balogh from the athletic department deserve all the credit. It was very well done. It was truly a wonderful moment of pride for UVM and our state, but most importantly for an exceptional group of players and their coaches.

“You see, I've learned throughout my life – whether in work, politics or racing – that the team is always more important than the individual. There's something special that comes from true team chemistry, which allows us to accomplish so much more than we could ever achieve alone.

“Their coach, Rob Dow, spoke passionately about the team’s Three Pillars: Hard work, discipline, and dedication to one another – principles that brought them success.

“I have spoken a lot about our desperate need for good role models and Rob has proven he’s one of them. At a time when many seem to have forgotten how to treat one another, we must strive to do better and remember our kids are watching and want to be just like us.

“The way the team carried and conducted themselves has been inspiring. They’ve represented Vermont with class. In fact, in one week’s time, they made such an impression on James, their bus driver from North Carolina who carted them around for the tournament, that he took it upon himself to make the 17-hour drive up with his family to celebrate this weekend. That says a lot about the team – and James.

“Hard work, discipline and dedication – another example for us to follow as we take on big challenges this session.

“Patty, Rob, Jeff and Krista are here today. Please join this very proud alum in welcoming them.

“The budget I present today follows through on my commitment to Vermonters to prioritize affordability and solutions to address demographics, like a 21st century education system and housing people can afford, while revitalizing cities, towns and villages in all parts of the state.

“Taxpayers also made it clear they want us to *fix* broken systems not just *fund* them. So, I will forward four bills that address housing, public safety, education and affordability to improve in each of these areas. Focusing on these issues is critical to improving our demographics, which – alongside making Vermont more affordable – has to be at the center of everything we do.

“This session won’t be easy because we’re expected to solve big problems. But if we stay focused and you put your community and the wellbeing of the entire state first, we will deliver the brighter future Vermonters asked for and deserve.

“In total, across all funds, I’m proposing a \$9 billion budget.

“It doesn’t raise taxes or fees, and invests to grow our economy, make Vermont more affordable and protect the most vulnerable.

“For those of you in your first term, I remember when I was in your seat listening to my first budget address given by Governor Howard Dean. There was so much government jargon, I said to myself, *what’s he talking about?*

Base, one time, carry forwards, reversions, limited service, match, stabilization reserve, unfunded liabilities? I thought I understood a little bit about finances, but this was all new to me.

“So let’s break it down a bit:

“First, there’s one time vs. base. One time is exactly what it sounds like – money we only expect this year, so we can’t count on it in the future. We need base funds for that, which is ongoing revenue to pay for core operations.

“And we have to be strategic when deciding between the two. For instance, we’ve got a lot of cash right now – about \$1.6 billion, mostly due to the federal money that came our way after the pandemic. Now, don’t get too excited because all that money is dedicated to infrastructure. But in the meantime, it generates a lot of interest – about \$60 million this year alone. That money, however, continues to go out the door. So, the revenue from interest will subside, meaning we can’t count on it forever. The same goes for our pension funds, which are also doing pretty well these days due to a healthy market.

“But we can’t believe our own magic because, as I recently heard from someone in the finance world, “Don’t confuse a bull market with brilliance.”

“Next, for emerging needs, we can make changes to last year’s budget in what’s called the BAA – the Budget Adjustment Act.

“On our side, we’ve kept this proposal pretty lean and clean this year. The only item you might consider new is \$10 million to give the Agency of Human Services (AHS) flexibility for urgent needs in the healthcare system.

“We decided to transfer the remaining surplus revenue to make investments in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, which I’ll talk about shortly.

“Then there’s the capital bill, overseen by the Institutions committees. They consider investments we want to make for capital projects, like courthouses; state police barracks; state parks; water, sewer and stormwater utilities; as well as priorities like housing.

“Think about this as an investment in tangible things that last a while because this is borrowed money that’s paid back over a long period of time.

“This year, the debt affordability committee suggested we reduce borrowing. So, my bill proposes \$100 million over two years.

“Then we get to the big three.

“There’s the Education Fund (Ed Fund), which this year totals \$2.4 billion. And we’ll talk more about that in a bit.

“Next is the Transportation Fund (T-Fund), which between state and federal money totals \$858 million for things like roads, bridges, winter maintenance, public transit, rail, airports and much more.

“Decades ago, the T-Fund was flush with cash, so lawmakers diverted revenue to prop up other parts of the budget, including what’s called the JTOC transfer. At one time, it moved over \$45 million to the General Fund. But we’ve steadily worked that down to around \$20 million.

“The problem is, due to the sheer number of projects and escalating costs, the T-Fund now needs that money. So, let’s take a step toward making this fund whole by eliminating the JTOC transfer once and for all.

“If you are keeping track, we started with about \$9 billion.

“\$3.1 billion is federal money, which – other than the half-a-billion dollars for transportation – primarily supports Medicaid and other human service programs. So, we don’t have much control over that spending.

“Of the \$5.9 billion that comes from state funds, almost *half* goes to pre-K-12 education. Because on top of the Ed Fund, the General Fund pays \$225 million for teachers’ pensions and other benefits. And \$340 million goes to Transportation.

“So, what’s left is about \$2.9 billion... which has to cover everything else.

“That brings me to the General Fund, where most of the action takes place.

“Now, I know many of you saw the big revenue upgrade last week and think we’re in pretty good shape. But even with a strong economy, balancing this budget wasn’t easy.

“Here’s why: Just to provide the *exact same* programs and services as last year, it costs us \$133 million *more* this year. That’s due to increases in pensions, health benefits, human services and other pressures.

“What this means is that 90% of the General Fund is used to *just* keep the lights on.

“With all these obligations, the two-and-a-half billion we started with is now down to just \$250 million. And while that’s a lot of money, it goes quickly because there were nearly half-a-billion dollars in new funding requests.

“So, even with a surplus we can’t do everything we want. That’s why budgeting is typically about choosing between many good things. And we have to. Because at the end of the day, Vermonters were very clear: They expect us to separate our wants from our needs and live within their means.

“That starts with housing, where it’s too hard and too expensive to buy, own or rent.

“The data tells us we need over 7,000 units just to keep our head above water. With the lack of supply, it’s no surprise that a quarter of renters spend half their income on housing. Or that the median home price increased by 43% in just four years.

“Now, for those who might not see the need or are not sure about having more neighbors, think about it this way:

“More housing can help pay for schools without adding to your property tax. More housing for workers keeps employers in business and brings in more revenue. It gives families financial security that can improve health and public safety. And it can brighten neighborhoods and revitalize downtowns.

“This is what we can achieve. Because it’s not just about units, it’s about community and opportunity.

“We have learned a lot over the last several years, after investing hundreds of millions of dollars in this area. And my team has a plan to build on what’s worked and fix what hasn’t.

“First, we’ll continue to be creative, finding ways to invest in more and better housing.

“With hundreds of millions of dollars to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) in recent years, traditional affordable units are still coming online. And my budget fully funds VHCB with almost \$37 million.

“But these partners can’t solve this crisis on their own. So, let’s help more “mom and pop” investors build and restore homes with Infill Technical Assistance and our Homes for All toolkit. And let’s make our very successful

Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP) permanent with \$4 million in base funding.

“These VHIP units come online faster and at a fraction of the cost of other programs. They also lift people out of homelessness. Take the couple my team recently met in St. Johnsbury, who transitioned from the Shelter at Moose River to a VHIP unit downtown, where they’re back on their feet and within walking distance to their jobs.

“That shelter, by the way, was stood up by VHCB and our Housing Opportunity Program (HOP), so we are giving that program [HOP] another \$3.3 million, and \$2 million more to AHS for emergency shelters.

“But if we want to get ahead of this, we also need to keep people housed. And our Mobile Home Improvement and Repair (MHIR) program is making a big difference. So, let’s make it permanent with

“\$2 million in base funding.

“These initiatives, and many other ongoing programs in the budget, give families opportunities they may not otherwise have.

“Take Renn and Cory Boudreau. They worked for years to afford a place to raise their 4-year-old daughter in the community where Renn grew up. With help from our Downpayment Assistance Program and a MHIR grant that covered the foundation and site work, their mortgage payment was reduced by half – making their dream of owning their own home a reality.

“Next, we can do more to help restore homes and businesses in the heart of our communities.

“Our Downtown and Village Center Tax Credits are extremely successful, and we consistently have more applicants than we can fund. So, let’s dedicate another \$2 million, for a total of \$5 million a year, to help turn around more of these town centers.

”We’ve proven cleaning up brownfields helps achieve our housing, economic, and environmental goals.

“It’s a win for everyone, so let’s invest another \$2 million.

“And incentives matter. So, let’s make sure Bennington, Essex and Grand Isle counties get the same property tax incentive we gave every other county in last year’s land use bill.

“Now, my budget also dedicates over \$30 million – which is among the largest one-time allocations we’ll make – for what’s known as our

“Hotel/Motel” program. But I want to be clear: This is *funding*, not *fixing* the problem.

“It’s *permanent* solutions that will – and are – helping families across the state.

“An important area to fix is infrastructure.

“There are many projects, right now, with the financing and permits for hundreds of units but the cost of water, sewer and stormwater is holding them back.

“To help, I propose a *significant* and strategic state investment.

“My capital bill dedicates about \$1 million each to close this gap for three projects: Barre’s Prospect Heights; the Bennington High School conversion; and Brattleboro’s Winston Prouty renovation.

“In total, this will support over 300 new homes and childcare for 100 kids. And with another \$40 million in one-time funds, we can help more municipalities and create more workforce housing with this critical infrastructure.

“This historic investment will make a *huge* difference, speeding up projects and lowering building costs all around the state.

“Expanding the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program will add to this effort.

“TIF is a valuable tool that bigger towns have used to take on major projects that jumpstart economic development. It allows municipalities to use a portion of the increase in tax revenue to pay for projects that ultimately add to the grand list and grow the local economy.

“Some criticize the program because they claim the money collected from the property tax diverts money from education. But that math is short sighted. Because the reality is TIFs will add nearly \$60 million to the Ed Fund.

“See, I don’t believe the critics are taking into account the long-term benefits of this creative economic development tool. Without TIFs, downtown St. Albans, Winooski’s city center, Burlington’s waterfront and Milton’s economic hub, would not be what they are today.

“But you will notice these projects are in bigger towns and cities in Northwest Vermont. So, let’s extend this option to smaller towns and on a smaller scale. Because they too deserve a chance for better infrastructure, better housing and more climate resilience.

“Finally, we have to break down regulatory barriers in more parts of the state.

“That includes adding commonsense standards for appeals, like those used in Massachusetts and the State of Washington.

“Last year, we all agreed that Act 250 exemptions are a way to jumpstart housing. But too many towns were carved out. So, my bill expands and extends them, and adjusts the Tiers to make sure our smaller, rural towns are not *once again* left behind.

“If this is truly a goal we all share, we must take more steps to *legalize housing*, so communities and families can thrive in all parts of our state.

“We also need people to feel safe. Unfortunately, they don’t, and the data backs them up.

“According to the Vermont Intelligence Center, 2024 was the third straight year with more than 20 homicide victims.

“Between 2018 and 2023, aggravated assaults increased by 40%. Reported motor vehicles, identity and retail thefts have each more than doubled. And from 2022 to 2023 alone, reports of shoplifting increased by 40%. These crimes impact our communities. They hurt our retailers and downtowns. And customers, residents and visitors are staying away.

“I believe one solution is more accountability.

“Some of the laws we’ve passed, including some I signed, have removed consequences, especially for young adults.

“For example, “Raise the Age.” If we do nothing, come April, those up to age 20 who break the law will be pushed into a system meant for children, which is not equipped to handle adults or hold them accountable. This law already covers those up to 19, and it is straining our social workers and our communities. So, let’s repeal it for 19-year-olds, *and* make changes to how we handle youthful offenders, so we don’t go any further down this precarious path.

“We also need to make it easier to revoke bail, limit the ability to reduce or suspend sentences, seal criminal records instead of erasing them and provide more tools to hold repeat offenders accountable, including funding to expand last year’s pilot for pre-trial supervision.

“We have all seen the headlines. There are far too many people with hundreds of law enforcement encounters, dozens of arrests and many active criminal court cases. Yet, they’re still walking free.

“This wastes time and resources, adds to the court’s backlog, and erodes faith in law enforcement, the courts and us.

“Enough is enough. Let’s fix it.

“Many of these crimes, and those committing them, overlap with addiction and mental health issues.

“By retooling existing services and programs, we can provide them with immediate and long-term treatment. To get started, we will invest nearly \$1.5 million in state funds, which gets us another \$1 million from the feds.

“The Agency of Human Services will repurpose existing beds to help law enforcement with people impaired by drugs or alcohol.

“We’ve been a leader in providing Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in our corrections system. Because accountability and intervention can be what people need to turn their lives around. And we can give them even more tools for long-term success by adapting the St. Johnsbury Work Camp to offer more comprehensive treatment.

“We can also fill gaps in recovery by creating beds specifically for those who have relapsed and want to get back on track, as well as a new 15-bed recovery campus.

“By pairing this work with other programs, like drug treatment diversion, stronger conditions of release and pre-trial supervision, we can offer a clear path to lasting recovery.

“And that is exactly what we need because reducing the size of the addicted population is the only way to truly turn the corner on both public health *and* public safety.

“Since 2011, we’ve had 26 federal disaster declarations, which is double what we used to see. Climate resiliency is critical to adapting to this new reality. But we don’t have enough state dollars to buy our way out of it. So, we are working to get the most out of federal resources.

“We’ve already gotten this going in places like Richmond, Lyndon and Hardwick using some of the \$85 million in FEMA Hazard Mitigation grants plus \$12.5 million from the State.

“And we’ll get another \$68 million in federal money to do even more, especially in Washington and Lamoille counties where most of it is required to go. After Irene, these funds helped places like Brattleboro and Waterbury replace housing, and in Wilmington and Johnson it helped repair and harden local businesses.

“This combination of federal money will be used to buy out unsafe properties, shore up infrastructure, and reduce future flood risks along rivers and streams.

“As we’ve seen in recent years, towns who need the most help have the hardest time getting it, which makes the “Two Vermonts” divide even worse.

“With no full-time professional staff, town clerks and selectboards – many who have other jobs – have seen their workload double and their budgets explode following back-to-back floods. They simply can’t keep up. We’ve helped bridge this gap with our Municipal Technical Assistance Program. So, we will continue this support and fund dozens of other projects in small towns and villages with \$3 million this year.

“These same municipalities are at a disadvantage when it comes to buying out properties in the floodplain because when these homes and businesses get removed, local property tax revenue is lost. So, we’ll use \$1 million as a temporary bridge to replace municipal revenue lost due to buy outs.

“In 2023, and again last summer, we acted quickly to create a Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program (BEGAP). So far, we have helped nearly 700 businesses, farms and non-profits get back on their feet. But this demand is not going away. So, let’s work with the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) to start a disaster recovery fund with \$2 million in unspent BEGAP money.

“Just like we did with pandemic recovery funds, we can once again turn major challenges into transformational change that creates more housing and strengthens disadvantaged communities – all without asking taxpayers for more.

“We should take the same approach when it comes to addressing climate change.

“Reducing emissions is a goal we share. Where we’ve often differed is how to get there. Because when people can’t afford it, we can’t achieve it. So, we need changes to the Global Warming Solutions Act.

“First, we should follow the U.S. Climate Alliance when tracking our goals by accounting for net emissions, not gross. This matters because it acknowledges the role of our farms and forests.

“If we want to protect Vermonters, we have to remove the provision that allows special interests to sue us, which, by the way, is already happening – and it will slow down progress.

“And instead of working towards arbitrary deadlines we know we can’t meet; I will direct the Agency of Natural Resources to develop a practical plan that figures out what it will actually take to reach the 2050 goals and how much it will cost. This is what we did for clean water. And just like our clean water plan, we can do it without costing Vermonters more.

“As our affordability crisis is making us rethink how we do things in education, housing and healthcare, we can do the same with climate.

“Efficiency Vermont has been an important partner in helping businesses and residents reduce the use and cost of energy. Let’s capitalize on what they’ve built by expanding their mission to include climate action and directing \$15 million from the energy efficiency surcharge to reduce climate pollution. With this strategy, we can lower the energy burden *and* continue our significant climate investments.

“We will also propose changes to last year’s Renewable Energy Standard, taking a commonsense approach to reduce the cost for ratepayers.

“And we should revisit the climate superfund bill because it is *already* costing taxpayers money as we defend the first of what could be many lawsuits.

“This session, let’s focus on the fundamentals, pass climate policies with real solutions to achieve our goals, and worry *less* about making national headlines, and *more* about what Vermonters can do and afford.

“On education, I want to start by thanking the Speaker and Pro Tem for joining my team at the table, and all of you for being willing to listen and consider our proposals for stronger schools, and stronger students.

“I spent a lot of time in my Inaugural talking about the challenges and shortfalls in our current system.

“So, today I’ll keep it simple:

“Our kids are not getting what they deserve from the \$2.4 billion we spend. Neither are teachers or taxpayers.

“The reason is an approach to financing that drives up costs and fuels inequity, along with a structure that’s far too big for a declining number of students.

“But here’s the good news: We have the rare opportunity to increase quality and equity across all schools, pay teachers more, and rein in costs, so it is sustainable for taxpayers.

“As you know, we are proposing a new approach to education funding.

“This starts with setting a base amount that will be distributed equally for all students, so that kids in Sudbury get the same quality as kids in Stowe.

“Here’s how we do that:

“First, with our new, higher academic standards, we will calculate the cost to educate students.

“Second, we will make sure all districts can provide things like early education, afterschool and summer programs, career and college training, and special courses like art, music and foreign language.

“Third, we will make sure all teachers, regardless of where they teach, can earn a competitive salary.

“Fourth, we will add to the base for those students and districts that have greater needs. Because today, not all of them are getting the extra support they should.

“Importantly, by reinvesting savings we can achieve this without driving up costs.

“Together, we have a lot of details to work out, including how new districts could raise additional funds, and how we fold in our independent schools, which are important to us, but this is only 3,500 kids out of 83,500, so we will figure this out.

“Getting this formula right will benefit taxpayers and bring a high-quality education with more opportunities for all students from cradle to career.

“Here’s the important part: For this to work we *must* right-size.

“So, we have put forward a simpler model with only five districts and one schoolboard each. Parents and locals will continue to be involved through school advisory councils, where they can focus on the things that matter most to kids and communities instead of defending difficult budget choices year after year.

“This change puts us much more in line with other states – many of which have better outcomes and most of which have lower costs.

“With this larger scale, districts can be creative and flexible. In contrast, right now, when looking for savings, the only option is to cut. In some schools, cuts mean one less academic coach. In others, cuts mean an entire educational program.

“This is *not* equal education. We can – and must – do better.

“We know this transition won’t be easy, which is why the Agency of Education will be on the ground, helping districts along the way. And I’ve proposed \$4 million to support them.

“We will also take a phased-in approach, implementing this over four years. We will give administrators and school boards evidenced-based backstops for school and class size and graduation requirements. We will make changes so the impact on tax rates is easier to understand for taxpayers and for those who build these school budgets.

“To ease the burden of some known expenses, I am proposing another \$10 million to help those schools currently dealing with PCB contamination.

“And my budget directs any additional surplus revenue that we could get in July, to a reserve fund to support this transition along the way.

“The bottom line is: We are committed to seeing this through with the least amount of disruption for kids, teachers, schools and taxpayers.

“Now, we know there will be something in this bill for just about everyone to dislike – maybe even hate.

“There will be campaigns and protests from special interests. The “critics say” headlines will circulate in papers and online. Many community members who begged for cost savings will petition against some of this change. We know all that and more is headed our way.

“But even so, I can tell you, I am ready to take this on. Because this is our moment.

“If we seize this opportunity, we can offer a world class public education for every student no matter where they live; build a system that attracts more families; prepare students for valuable careers; contribute to a stronger workforce; and support stronger communities in all corners of our state.

“That is what we can achieve this session. So, let’s be brave together and get it done.

“If we fail to make meaningful changes, we will be right back where we started – with higher and higher costs every year.

“We had a historic increase in education costs last year. And here we go again, because we are facing *another* average 6% increase in property tax bills.

“That’s not going to work for anyone.

“So, while we fix the education system, we can also use \$77 million in General Fund to eliminate this year’s projected property tax increase.

“But folks are hurting, so that’s not enough. We should provide some much-needed relief with a \$13.5 million tax reduction package. Here’s what it includes:

“As costs have gone up, those on a fixed income are hit the hardest, so we should increase eligibility for our social security income tax exemption.

“To help low-income working adults keep more of their paycheck, we can expand the Earned Income Tax Credit for those without dependents.

“We can cover more families with the Child Tax Credit by extending it up to age six.

“And as I’ve done nearly every year, I propose eliminating the income tax on military pensions – bringing us in line with nearly every other state, attracting a valuable and important part of the workforce, and making sure those who serve our nation can afford to thrive and retire here too.

“This session, we have an incredible opportunity – and a clear mandate – to fix the underlying structural issues that make Vermont unaffordable and make it harder to keep and attract the workers we need.

“And this budget shows us what happens when we don’t.

“Just think about this: About half of the \$250 million we have at our discretion is being *spent* to fill gaps, not *invested* to get us ahead. \$15 million – between the budget and BAA – to plug just *some* of the holes in healthcare. \$30 million for roughly 1,100 hotel rooms (not services for people) because we don’t have enough housing. And \$77 million to shield Vermonters from unsustainable growth in the cost of education.

“This is what *funding* our challenges without *fixing* them looks like. But we can change that. “With this budget and commonsense reforms, we can help more folks – from all income levels – put and keep a permanent roof over their head. We can address climate change without punishing people. We can help families feel safe in their neighborhoods once again. We can let them keep more of what they earn. We can restore left-behind communities, giving them back the pride and opportunity they once felt. And we can keep and attract the workforce and families we desperately need.

“As I said three weeks ago, *we* can be the ones who *finally* tackle these challenges head on.”

“We can leave this place better than we found it, with a legacy that gives generations of kids, workers, families and communities the more affordable, stronger, and brighter future they deserve.”

Dissolution

The Governor, having completed the delivery of his message, was escorted from the Hall by the committee appointed by the Chair.

The purpose for which the Joint Assembly was convened having been accomplished, the Chair then declared the Joint Assembly dissolved.

Melissa R. Gradel
Assistant Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the Joint Assembly

IN JOINT ASSEMBLY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025

10:30 A.M.

The Senate and House of Representatives met in the hall of the House of Representatives pursuant to a joint resolution which was read by the Clerk and is as follows:

J.R.S. 12. Joint resolution providing for the election of a Sergeant at Arms and three Trustees of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the two Houses meet in Joint Assembly on Thursday, February 20, 2025, at ten o'clock and thirty minutes in the forenoon to elect a Sergeant at Arms and three trustees of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College. In case election of all such officers shall not be made on that day, the two Houses shall meet in Joint Assembly at ten o'clock and thirty minutes in

the forenoon, on each succeeding day, Saturdays and Sundays excepted, and proceed in such election, until all such officers are elected.

Presiding Officer

Honorable Virginia V. Lyons, temporary President *pro tempore* of the Senate, in the Chair.

Clerk

John H. Bloomer, Jr., Secretary of the Senate, Clerk.

Statement by Presiding Officer

“Pursuant to our Constitution and statutes we are assembled here today in Joint Assembly for the election, of a Sergeant at Arms and three Trustees for the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College.

“With respect to the election of all of these officers, if a contest exists, then the voting must be done by written ballot. This mandate is set forth in 2 V.S.A. §12 and in Joint Rule 10(a). The Chair now calls to the attention of the Joint Assembly the text of Joint Rule 10 which applies to elections held by the Assembly:

“Rule 10(a): Whenever a joint assembly is required to elect one or more persons to any office, the voting shall be by ballot, except that if there is only one candidate for any office, and if there is no objection, the chair may put the question to the joint assembly by voice vote.

“(b) If two or more offices are filled, each office will be voted upon and decided separately. If two or more vacancies for the same office are to be filled, nominations for all vacancies will be received before voting begins for the first vacancy, but each vacancy will be voted upon and decided separately. The joint assembly may limit the number and length of nominating and seconding speeches for each candidate.

“(c) Election to any office is by a majority of the votes cast, exclusive of spoiled and blank ballots. After two votes have been taken for any vacancy without an election, all nominees except the two having the highest number of votes on the second ballot shall be withdrawn, and voting shall then continue until a candidate is elected. In no event shall the involuntary removal of nominees result in fewer than two nominees remaining in the contest.

“(d) The person who first nominated a candidate may withdraw that candidate's name any time; a withdrawal may be complete or may be limited to one or more vacancies. A candidate for any office having more than one vacancy who is defeated for the first vacancy shall automatically be a candidate for success vacancies, unless the nomination is voluntarily withdrawn.”

Number and Length of Nominating and Second Speeches

“For purposes of this Joint Assembly all nominations for these offices will be received by the Chair prior to voting, presented in alphabetical order.

“And there will be one nominating speech of not more than three minutes and not more than two seconding speeches of not more than one minute for each nominee.”

Statement by Presiding Officer

“We have two sets of elections today:

“a. First, To elect a Sergeant at Arms.

“b. Second, To elect three UVM Trustees.

“For the first election, that for the Sergeant at Arms, since there is no contest the provisions of Joint Rule 10(a) will apply.

“This means that election may be by voice vote if there is no objection.

“For the elections of the three trustees of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, as there is a contest, the election shall be by ballot.”

Tellers Appointed

“As stated before, one of our elections today is contested and must be decided by written ballot.

“Accordingly, we will need tellers, and the Chair now appoints as tellers:

Senator Brian P. Collamore, of Rutland District, as Chief Teller

Senator Tanya C. Vyhovsky, of Chittenden-Central District

Senator Anne E. Watson, of Washington District

Representative Kirk White, of Bethel

Representative Ashley R. Bartley, of Fairfax

Representative Jed Lipsky, of Stowe

Representative Ela Chapin, of East Montpelier”

Election of Sergeant at Arms

The Joint Assembly then proceeded to the election of a Sergeant at Arms.

For the office of Sergeant at Arms, Representative Mollie S. Burke of Brattleboro nominated *Agatha Kessler*, of Barre Town.

The nomination was seconded by Representative Michael J. Marcotte of Coventry.

There being no other nominations, the Chair declared that nominations were closed.

Whereupon, no other nominations being made, the vote was taken *viva voce* pursuant to Joint Rule 10(a), and the Chair declared that

AGATHA KESSLER, of Barre Town

was unanimously elected to the office of Sergeant at Arms for a term of two years, from and including the first day of March, 2025, and until her successor is elected and has qualified.

Election of UVM Trustees

The Joint Assembly then proceeded to the election of three Trustees of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, each for a term of six years, from and including the first day of March, 2025.

Statement by the Presiding Officer

“The Chair reminds the Joint Assembly that nominations for the office of three University of Vermont and State Agricultural College Trustees will be received in alphabetical order, with one nominating speech of not more than three minutes and not more than two seconding speeches of not more than one minute for each nominee.

“For the election of these trustees, we will be operating under the temporary rules set forth in J.R.S. 13

“The adoption of J.R.S. 13 permits the Joint Assembly to elect the Three Trustees of the University of Vermont and Agricultural College by a plurality vote”

Nominations for UVM Trustees

Representative Thomas S. Stevens of Waterbury nominated *Representative John L. Bartholomew* of Hartland. The nomination was seconded by Representative Matthew E. Walker of Swanton.

Senator Thomas I. Chittenden of Chittenden-Southeast District then nominated *Senator Scott L. Beck* of Caledonia District. The nomination was seconded by Representative Emilie K. Kornheiser of Brattleboro.

Representative Michael Mrowicki of Putney then nominated *Representative Kevin B. “Coach” Christie* of Hartford. The nomination was seconded by Representative Elizabeth Burrows of West Windsor.

Senator Rebecca E. White of Windsor District then nominated *Representative Troy Headrick* of Burlington. The nomination was seconded by Representative Conor Casey of Montpelier.

Representative Martin J. LaLonde of South Burlington then nominated *Representative Carole Ode* of Burlington. The nomination was seconded by Representative James F. Harrison of Chittenden.

Summary of Names Placed in Nomination

The five members placed in nomination and on the ballot for the office of Trustee of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College are as follows:

John L. Bartholomew, of Hartland
 Scott L. Beck, of Caledonia District
 Kevin B. "Coach" Christie, of Hartland
 Troy Headrick, of Burlington
 Carole Ode, of Burlington

Review of Voting Procedure

Prior to the taking of any ballots, the Chair reviewed the "plurality" procedure for choosing candidates, by quoting verbatim from the text of J.R.S. 13, as follows:

"(1) All candidates for the office of trustee shall be voted upon and decided on the same ballot; members may vote for any number of candidates up to and including the maximum number of vacancies to be filled, which in this case shall be three.

(2) The three candidates receiving the greatest number of votes shall be declared elected to fill the three vacancies.

(3) In the event that the first balloting for the trustee vacancies results in a tie vote for one or more of the three vacant positions, then voting shall continue on successive ballots until the vacancies have been filled, again by election declared of those candidates receiving the greatest number of votes."

Results of Balloting for University of Vermont and State Agricultural College Trustees

The ballots were taken and counted, and the result was as follows:

Total ballots	172
Necessary for election.....	three greatest numbers of votes
Bartholomew.....	65*
Beck.....	115*
Christie.....	43
Headrick.....	58
Ode.....	90*
Write-in votes.....	2

Whereupon the Chair declared that

SENATOR SCOTT L. BECK, of Caledonia District

having received the most votes cast was duly elected a Trustee of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College for a term of six years, commencing March 1, 2025.

The Chair further declared that

REPRESENTATIVE CAROL ODE, of Burlington

having received the second most number of votes cast was duly elected a Trustee of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College for a term of six years, commencing March 1, 2025.

The Chair further declared that

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN L. BARTHOLOMEW, of Hartland

having received the third most number of votes cast was duly elected a Trustee of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College for a term of six years, commencing March 1, 2025.

Dissolution

The purposes for which the Joint Assembly was convened having been accomplished, the Chair then declared the Joint Assembly dissolved.

John H. Bloomer, JR.
Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the Joint Assembly

IN JOINT ASSEMBLY, MARCH 20, 2025

10:30 A.M.

The Senate and House of Representatives met in the Hall of the House of Representatives pursuant to a Joint Resolution which was read by the Clerk and is as follows:

J.R.S. 16 Joint resolution providing for a Joint Assembly to vote on the retention of seven Superior Court Judges and one Magistrate.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the two Houses meet in Joint Assembly on Thursday, March 20, 2025, at ten o'clock and thirty minutes in the forenoon to vote on the retention of seven Superior Court Judges and one Magistrate. In case the vote to retain said Judges and Magistrate shall not be made on that day, the two Houses shall

meet in Joint Assembly at ten o'clock and thirty minutes in the forenoon, on each succeeding day, Saturdays and Sundays excepted, and proceed until the above is completed.

Presiding Officer

Honorable John S. Rodgers, President of the Senate, in the Chair.

Clerk

John H. Bloomer, Jr., Secretary of the Senate, Clerk.

Statement of Presiding Officer

“Pursuant to our Constitution and statutes we are assembled here today in Joint Assembly to cast our votes on the retention of seven Superior Judges, and one Magistrate.

“This year we are again operating under the Judicial Retention Act passed in 1976, as amended in subsequent sessions of the General Assembly, which establishes the procedure for retention of incumbent Superior Judges and Magistrates. Amendments made in 2010 require the retention of Magistrates. The date for holding joint assemblies for the retention of judges is set by statute to be the eleventh Thursday of the session.

“The procedure to be followed requires the vote be by written ballot. There will be two separate written ballots: one containing the names of all of the candidates for retention as Superior Judges; and one containing the name of the candidate for retention as Magistrate.”

Retention of Superior Judges

We shall now proceed to the matter of retention of the incumbent Superior Judges. Under the Judicial Retention Act which establishes the procedure for the retention of Superior Judges, nominations may not be received from the floor; rather, each judge seeking retention must file a declaration of intention to seek retention with the Secretary of State or if a Superior Judge is appointed after September 1 of the year preceding the expiration of the term of offices the Superior Judge shall automatically be a candidate for retention without filing notice. The name of each judge seeking retention is automatically voted on pursuant to the terms of the Judicial Retention Act.

In addition, the Judicial Retention Act provides that when a candidate does so declare for retention, the question to be decided is:

"Shall the following Superior Judges be retained in office?"

Tellers Appointed

“Accordingly, we will need tellers, and the Chair now appoints as tellers:

Senator Brian P. Collamore, of Rutland District, as Chief Teller
Senator Tanya C. Vyhovsky, of Chittenden-Central District
Senator Ann E. Watson, of Washington District
Representative Abbey Duke, of Burlington
Representative Allen “Penny” Demar, of Enosburgh
Representative Laura Sibilia, of Dover
Representative Chloe Tomlinson, of Winooski“

“With respect to the matter of retention of the incumbent Superior Judges. For these positions we have received declarations of intention to seek retention to the office of Superior Judge from the following:

Henry Dickson Corbett, IV.
Kevin William Griffin
Howard Andrew Kalfus
Elizabeth D. Mann
Megan J. Shafritz
Timothy Bert Tomasi
Thomas A. Zonay

“The question to be decided in each of these cases shall be as follows:

"Shall Superior Judge Henry Dickson Corbett, IV be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

"Shall Superior Judge Kevin William Griffin be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

"Shall Superior Judge Howard Andrew Kalfus be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

"Shall Superior Judge Elizabeth D. Mann be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

"Shall Superior Judge Megan J. Safritz be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

"Shall Superior Judge Timothy Bert Tomasi be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

"Shall Superior Judge Thomas A. Zonay be retained in office?"

Yes_____No_____.

The ballot which you will receive will contain these questions in printed form on one single ballot. The terms of these Superior Judges are for six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until their successors are elected and qualified.

To facilitate the procedure for this morning, the Chair will rule, unless there is objection, that debate on these seven Superior Judges will be received separately. At the end of the debates for the seven Superior Judges, any general debate on the entire question shall be in order.”

Committee Reports

First, we will receive the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention. The Chair now recognizes the Chair of this Committee, the member from Williston, Representative Angela Arsenault, for the purpose of receiving her report.

Representative Angela Arsenault, then delivered a general report for the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention.

The Chair then recognized the member from Sheldon, Thomas Oliver, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Henry Dickson Corbett, IV.

The Chair then recognized the member from Montpelier, Representative Conor Casey, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Kevin William Griffin.

The Chair then recognized Senator Terry K. Williams, of Rutland District, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Howard Andrew Kalfus.

The Chair then recognized Senator Ruth Ellen Hardy, of Addison District, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Elizabeth D. Mann.

The Chair then recognized Senator Martine Larocque Gulick, of Chittenden-Central District, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Megan J. Shafritz.

The Chair then recognized the member from Williston, Representative Angela Arsenault, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Timothy B. Tomasi.

The Chair then recognized Senator Brian P. Collamore, of Rutland District, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Superior Judge Thomas A. Zonay.

Results of Balloting

Balloting then proceeded for the office of Superior Judges, with the following results:

For Superior Judge Henry Dickson Corbett, IV

Total votes cast..... 159
 Necessary for a majority..... 80
 For retention..... 157
 Against retention..... 2

Whereupon the Chair declared that

HENRY DICKSON CORBETT, IV of THETFORD

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until his successor is elected and has qualified.

For Superior Judge Kevin William Griffin

Total votes cast..... 159
 Necessary for a majority..... 80
 For retention..... 159
 Against retention..... 0

Whereupon the Chair declared that

KEVIN WILLIAM GRIFFIN, of NORWICH

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until his successor is elected and has qualified.

For Superior Judge Howard Andrew Kalfus

Total votes cast..... 159
 Necessary for a majority..... 80
 For retention..... 158
 Against retention..... 1

Whereupon the Chair declared that

HOWARD ANDREW KALFUS, of COLCHESTER

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until his successor is elected and has qualified.

For Superior Judge Elizabeth D. Mann

Total votes cast.....	159
Necessary for a majority.....	80
For retention.....	158
Against retention.....	1

Whereupon the Chair declared that

ELIZABETH D. MANN, of NORWICH

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2019, and until her successor is elected and has qualified.

For Superior Judge Megan J. Shafritz

Total votes cast.....	159
Necessary for a majority.....	80
For retention.....	159
Against retention.....	0

Whereupon the Chair declared that

MEGAN J. SHAFRITZ, of SOUTH BURLINGTON

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until her successor is elected and has qualified.

Whereupon the Chair declared that

For Superior Judge Timothy B. Tomasi

Total votes cast.....	159
Necessary for a majority.....	80
For retention.....	157
Against retention.....	2

Whereupon the Chair declared that

TIMOTHY B. TOMASI, of MONTPELIER

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until his successor is elected and has qualified.

For Superior Judge Thomas A. Zonay

Total votes cast.....	160
Necessary for a majority.....	81
For retention.....	159
Against retention.....	1

Whereupon the Chair declared that

THOMAS A. ZONAY, of TAFTSVILLE

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Superior Judge for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until his successor is elected and has qualified.

Retention of Magistrate

Statement of Presiding Officer

“We shall now proceed to the matter of retention of the incumbent Magistrate. For this position we have received a declaration of intention to seek retention to the office of Magistrate from the following:

Alicia Humbert

“The name of each magistrate seeking retention is automatically voted on, and the question to be decided is:

"Shall Magistrate Alicia Humbert be retained in office?"

Yes _____ No _____.

“The vote on this question shall again be by one single written ballot. The term of this Magistrate is for six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until her successor is elected and qualified.”

Committee Report

The Chair then recognized the member from Pittsford, Representative Alicia Malay, who delivered the report of the Joint Committee on Judicial Retention with respect to the candidacy of Magistrate Alicia Humbert.

Results of Balloting

Balloting then proceeded for the office of Magistrate, with the following result:

For Magistrate Alicia Humbert

Total votes cast.....	132
Necessary for a majority.....	67
For retention.....	132
Against retention.....	0

Whereupon the Chair declared that

ALICIA HUMBERT, of NORTHFIELD

having received a majority of the total votes cast was duly retained in the office of Magistrate for a term of six years, from and including the first day of April, 2025, and until her successor is elected and has qualified.

Dissolution

The purposes for which the Joint Assembly was convened having been accomplished, the Chair then declared the Joint Assembly dissolved.

JOHN H. BLOOMER, JR.
Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the Joint Assembly