

A CITIZEN GUIDE TO POLITICAL ACTIVISM



From the Office of Lieutenant Governor David Zuckerman

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January 2, 2018



Dear Fellow Vermonters,

Thank you for your desire to participate in our democracy and bring your voice to the table. We have the privilege to live in a democracy, but with that comes the responsibility to participate by working with your legislators, organizing around issues and voting. Over the past year I have been speaking around the state and asking Vermonters to **budget fifteen minutes a week for democracy**. I want to thank everyone who makes this commitment, and especially those who give more than fifteen minutes. Last year we saw the power of our collective voices when millions of Americans spoke against repealing the Affordable Care Act and were successful in protecting this important legislation. Your voice, unique perspective, and personal experience are valuable and sharing them will have an impact on the issues you are passionate about.

As a citizen, you have the power to help ensure good legislation by contacting your representatives, talking to your friends or co-workers, writing a letter to the editor or posting on Front Porch Forum, building a grassroots network or even running for public office. This Guide includes information on how to undertake each of these activities.

My office is dedicated to providing opportunities for access and information about issues currently taking place in the legislature. I invite you to:

- **Attend ‘Coffee with Constituents’** from 8:30-10:00AM every Friday when the legislature is in session. This is an opportunity to come to my office in the State House, have a cup of coffee or tea, and talk with me and others in the room about issues important to you. We can help you identify what legislators are working on the issue, what committee may be taking testimony, and approaches for the greatest impact.
- **Tune in to ‘Lunchtime Town Hall: Weekly Conversation with Lt. Governor David Zuckerman and Guests’** from 12:00-12:30PM streaming live on my Facebook Page @VTLtGov every Wednesday during the legislative session. Weekly conversations will focus on topical bills and you are welcome to post questions before or during via Facebook. This will also be archived for later viewing on my website www.ltgov.vermont.gov.
- **Sign-up to receive the Lt. Governor Zuckerman email newsletter** by emailing a request to megan.polyte@vermont.gov. If you already receive the newsletter invite some of your friends to sign-up. This is sent every 2-4 weeks and highlights issues, suggests actions, answers questions, and list upcoming events I will be attending.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, has been credited with the statement, “The office of Citizen is the highest in our land.” I hope you will take this call to action and join me in service to our state and country.

Citizen Participation

There are many ways you can impact dialogue and help bring change. Below are some we feel are particularly impactful. If you have questions or need assistance accessing these resources or reaching your legislators, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Lt. Governor.

Educate Yourself: It is important to take a little time learning about the issues you are passionate about. Learning if a bill has already been introduced, what committee is working on it, and what people are saying about it is important.

- **The Vermont Legislative Website** (<http://legislature.vermont.gov/>) **is a great place to start.** Use the Keyword search to see if any bills have already been introduced. By clicking on the bill you will learn which Senator/s or Representative/s introduced it. You will also learn any action that has been taken on it. You should look to see what committee it was assigned to, who sits on the committee, and if any testimony has been taken. Once you know where a bill stands you can decide how to most effectively help it proceed.
- **Pay attention to the news.** Bills that are advancing through the legislature are often covered by the media. In addition to your local paper you may want to visit the following online media sources. While you are there, read the comments and feel free to add your thoughts or show your support or opposition to comments already posted.

SEVEN DAYS
sevendaysvt.com

www.sevendaysvt.com



When the Vermont House or Senate is on the floor you can stream them live from VPR.

<http://digital.vpr.net/topic/vermont-legislature>



<https://vtdigger.org>

Share your expertise: Your life experiences, research, and interests provide you with genuine expertise. Legislators often rely on others to better understand the impact of legislation, gather information, and decide their position. Lobbyists are in the State House every day advocating for issues important to their clients. If you are concerned about an issue, please share with your legislators to inform their position. If you are concerned about an issue, please share your thoughts with your legislators.

- **Make sure that you are informed on the issue.** Take the time to read the background information on the bill or the issue you will be discussing.
- **Connect with your Legislators.** Some legislators are regularly seen around town, most are accessible by phone, some may require you to set a meeting with them. You can find contact information for your legislators by visiting <http://legislature.vermont.gov> and searching with the name of your town.
- **Never assume you know your legislator's position.** It is great to start the conversation by asking the legislator what they think about the issue and why.
- **Share your story.** Introduce yourself, share your experiences around the issue, make suggestions of ways you think the issue could be addressed.
- **Listen.** It is easy to become frustrated or angry when talking with people who disagree with you. Remember that this is a civil conversation, and that **you are more likely to get your point across if you remain cool and collected.** Listen and let the legislator explain their position.
- **Follow-Up.** During and after your meeting it is important to thank the legislator for taking time to talk with you and for their service. You may also want to send them links to data that supports your position or reiterate a personal story that is relevant.

Join or form a group around an issue important to you. At the end we have listed some organizations working in Vermont, but a simple google search will find many more. By attending rallies, protests, educational meetings, trainings and more you will build connections and amplify your voice.

“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF
THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED PEOPLE CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT
EVER HAS.”

Margaret Mead



Attend a Public Forum, Hearing or Committee Meeting.

Public Forums and Hearings are a way for members of committees working on a bill to receive public feedback. They are often held at the State House but sometimes travel around the state. They are open for citizens to watch and participate in. Generally there is an opportunity for citizens to provide testimony, usually it needs to be 3 minutes or shorter.

All Committee meetings are open to the public and your presence sends a message about support or opposition to a bill. When attending committee meetings you are not allowed to speak unless you have been scheduled to testify.

Public Forums, Hearings and Committee schedules are available at:
<http://legislature.vermont.gov/>.

Run for public office! From school boards, select boards, or planning commissions, all the way up to senator, representative or governor, every position matters. There are also opportunities to be appointed to a board, commission or study committee. We need more Vermonters to lend their time, voice, unique perspective and experience to the conversation. I hope you will consider public service.



VOTE! The best way to ensure that your voice is heard and that you get a say is to vote. In 2014, 439,782 people in Vermont were registered to vote, but voter turnout was only 196,086. That is only 44% of those who could vote. **Voting is of the utmost importance and is an absolute necessity to provoke positive change.**

Did you know?

1. The average age of a Vermont State Senator is 60 years old?
2. Currently only 39% of Vermont legislators are female.
3. In 2015 baby boomers made up 62% of Vermont legislators, but Gen x and Millennials only made up 16%.

If these statistics don't represent you, run for public office!

Writing to the Public:

- **Write a Letter to the Editor.** Write a letter to a publication of your choice outlining your expertise and stating your standpoints. Most letters should be around 200 or 300 words, however newspapers often have guidelines for what they are looking for in Letters to the Editor, such as specific length requirements — make sure to look these over.



**LETTERS
TO THE
EDITOR**

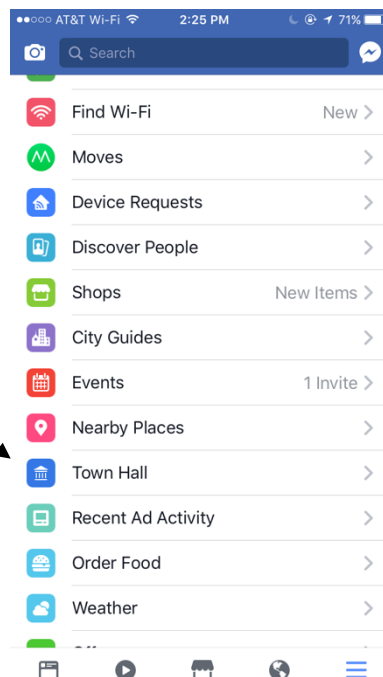
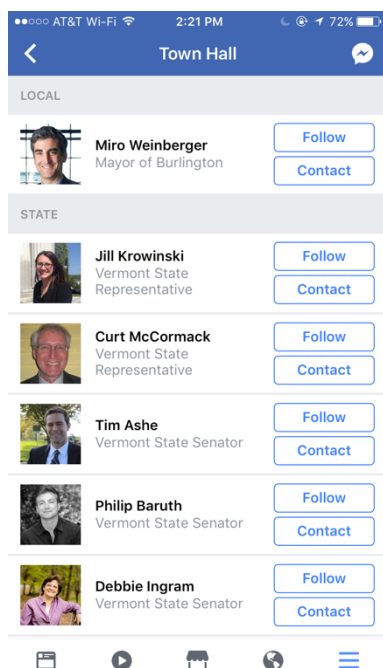
Offer evidence to back up your assertions instead of attacking differing opinions. If your letter is in response to an article the newspaper has published, make sure to write and send your letter in a timely fashion.

- **Post a Front Porch Forum:** Front Porch Forum is a great resource for staying up to date on the news of your neighborhood and is specific to Vermont. Through Front Porch Forum, you can write to your neighbors and friends in your area and help build community regarding the issues you are passionate about.

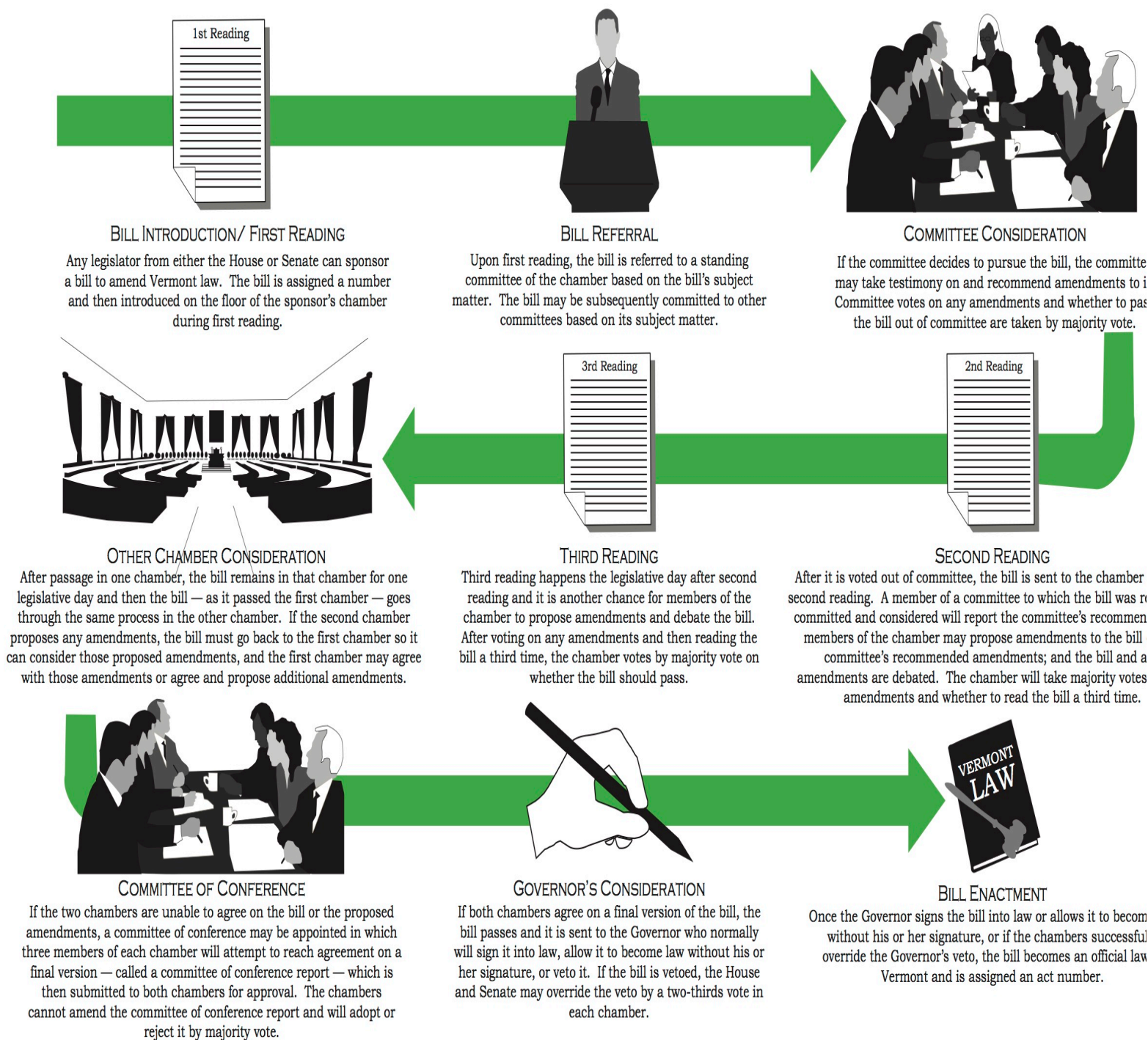


- **Social media as a political platform.**

Facebook is an important and powerful tool to make your voice heard. Many don't know the power of Facebook to connect constituents with their elected officials. Town Hall is an app within Facebook that works to make these connections, and is extremely easy to use.



HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW



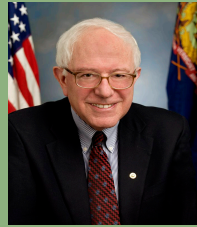
For more information on Vermont's legislative process, see "Vermont's Legislative Process" by the Clerk of the House, <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/HouseClerk/Vermont%20Legislative%20Process.htm>

Contacts for Elected Representatives

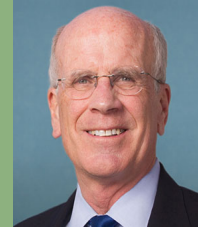
Federal Delegation



Senator Patrick Leahy
(D)
(802) 863-2525
www.leahy.senate.gov



Senator Bernie
Sanders (I)
(802) 862-0697
sanders.senate.gov



Congressman
Peter Welch (D):
(802) 652-2450
welch.house.gov

Statewide Elected Officials



Governor Phil Scott (R)
(802) 828-3333
governor.vermont.gov



Lieutenant Governor
David Zuckerman (P/D)
(802) 828-2226
<http://ltgov.vermont.gov>



Speaker of the House
Mitzi Johnson (D)
(802) 828-2226
<http://speaker.vermont.gov>
mjohnson@leg.state.vt.us



President pro tempore
Tim Ashe (D/P)
(802) 318-0903
timashe.com
tashe@leg.state.vt.us



Attorney General
TJ Donovan (D)
(802) 828-3171
ago.vermont.gov



State Auditor
Doug Hoffer (D)
(802) 828-2281
auditor.vermont.gov



State Treasurer
Beth Pearce (D)
(802) 828-1452
vermonttreasurer.gov



Secretary of State
Jim Condos (D)
(802) 828-2363
sec.state.vt.us

Local Senators and Representatives

You can find your local senator or representative by visiting <http://legislature.vermont.gov> and searching for the name of your town.

Resources to Get Active

1. One of the largest resources for Vermont citizens is the Vermont State Legislative website: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/>. On this website, you can find your legislators, track bills, review Committee members and schedules and so much more.

In Vermont, we have three major political parties:

Democratic Party: 802-229-1783

Info@vtdemocrats.org

The Democratic Party of Vermont is the Vermont affiliate of the United States Democratic Party. Currently, 18/30 seats in the State Senate are held by Democrats and 83/150 seats in the State House are held by Democrats.



Progressive Party: 802-229-0800

<http://progressiveparty.org/contact/>

The Vermont Progressive Party was founded in 1999 and is active only in the state of Vermont. Currently, 5/30 seats in the State Senate are held by Progressives and 7/150 seats in the State House are held by Progressives.



Republican Party:

http://www.vtgop.org/contact_us

The Republican Party of Vermont was founded in 1854 and is the Vermont political party affiliate of the National Republican Party. Currently, 7/30 seats in the State Senate are held by Republicans and 53/150 seats in the State House are held by Republicans.



Issue Based Organizations:

Ethan Allen Institute

<http://ethanallen.org>

802 695 1448

The mission of the Institute is to influence public policy in Vermont by helping its people to better understand implement a free society.

Justice For All VT

justiceforallvt.org

Our mission is to pursue racial justice for all within Vermont's criminal justice system through advocacy, education, and relationship-building.

Migrant Justice/Justicia Migrante

<https://migrantjustice.net>

802-540-8370

Our mission is to build the voice, capacity, and power of the farmworker community and engage community partners to organize for economic justice and human rights.

NAACP Vermont

<http://champlainareanaacp.wixsite.com/champlain-area-naacp>

The mission of the NAACP is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

Peace and Justice Center

<http://www.pjcv.org>

802-863-2345

The Peace and Justice Center's mission is to create a just and peaceful world.

Planned Parenthood Vermont Action Fund

<http://ppvtaf.org>

The Vermont Action Fund engages in educational and electoral activity as the Vermont arm of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England.

Pride Center of Vermont

<http://pridecentervt.org>

802.860.7812

PCVT is dedicated to advancing community and the health and safety of LGBTQ Vermonters.

Public Assets Institute

<http://publicassets.org>

802-223-6677

The Public Assets Institute's mission is to improve the well-being of ordinary citizens by conducting research that leads to the development of policies that state government can enact.

Rights & Democracy VT

<http://www.radvt.org>

(802) 448-0326

Our mission is to bring people together to take action to build healthy communities and make the values of our communities guide the policies of our government.

Renewable Energy Vermont

<http://www.revermont.org>

(802) 229-0099

REV's primary mission is to dramatically increase the growth of renewables and efficiency businesses in Vermont.

Sierra Club

<http://vermont.sierraclub.org>

The Sierra Club focuses on working toward a sustainable future in Vermont. View their website to learn more about their definition of sustainability.

Vermont Coalition to Regulate Marijuana

<http://www.regulatevermont.org>

VCRM is a coalition of Vermonters who believe it is time to end the prohibition of marijuana in Vermont.

Vermont Public Interest Research Group

vpig.org

Promoting and protecting the health of Vermont's people, environment and locally-based economy by informing and mobilizing citizens statewide.

Vermont Right to Life Committee

<http://www.vrlc.net>

802-229-4885

The mission of the VRLC is to achieve universal recognition of the sanctity of human life.

Planning Your Visit to the State House



January – May hours:
Open Mon & Friday 7:45-5
Tues, Wed, Thurs 7:45-8

Summer/Fall hours:
Mon-Fri 7:45-4:15 and Sat 11-3

115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633
(802) 828-2228

Visiting the State House is a great way to learn about issues you care about first hand, and provides a way for you to interact with legislators and issue actors. Visiting the State House is an important step in political involvement, as it demonstrates firsthand how our government is run.

Legislative Session: January 3, 2018– Mid May

1) Is There a Specific Issue You Care About?

Educate yourself about the issue. Familiarize yourself with the issue actors and legislators that are involved in the issue.

2) Check Committee Schedules

Use legislature.vermont.gov as a key resource. Use the search bar to search a bill number or issue keyword – the search will provide information on the current committee discussing the bill. Check committee schedules under the committee tab.

3) Make Appointments with Legislators

It's easy to contact a legislator to make an appointment to meet with them by sending a quick email. Legislators appreciate hearing constituent voices. **The Lt. Governor hosts coffee with constituents in his office every Friday 8:30 am – 10 am** – show up and make your voice heard!

4) Observe Committee Meetings and Floor Debates

The wonderful thing about the Vermont State House is that anybody can observe committee meetings and floor debates. Simply walk into any committee room to observe. Take note that there are no electronics allowed in the Senate chamber.



Special thanks to Catharine Greenberg and Emily von Weise for their dedication to democracy and assistance with creating this guide.