

I am Beth Walsh and I serve as the President of the Vermont State Colleges United Professionals. I also am the Director of Career Development at Northern Vermont University in Johnson. My history with Johnson actually started before I was born. My mother, Gladys Clark Menkens, attended Johnson Teachers' College.

In 2014 she wrote a short essay called "A Lucky Life" that told how her life was changed at Johnson. She wrote, "I applied and was accepted only days before the school year started. Who knew that teaching and I would be a perfect match. That I, a private person, would find joy and fulfillment spending my days learning with hundreds of children over the years....What luck!"

While each of our institutions have changed their names several times over the years, we continue to change the lives of our students. Some come to us knowing what they want to do. Other come knowing what they don't want to do. And many come looking for a career path that will bring them "joy and fulfillment", not really knowing what that might be.

I have come before several committees in the past few years, always with the same message. The Vermont State Colleges cannot survive without a substantial increase in state appropriations. Our tuition is too high, our young people leave the state for less student debt, and our older students struggle to improve their situations because of the expense. I understand that the demographics of fewer college aged students in the Northeast is not in our favor. What the research of professor Greg Petrics has shown, however, is that our shrinking enrollment is tied to our growing tuition, not to the demographics.

The survival of our public college system is essential to the health and wellbeing of our communities, our businesses and nonprofits, and our state. We are here for the public good. For the benefit of Vermont. Although the money is important, it isn't just the money. With a college degree:

- The likelihood of reporting health to be very good or excellent is 44 percent greater.
- The probability of being in prison or jail is 4.9 times lower.
- The likelihood of being happy is significantly higher.
- Voting and political involvement are significantly higher.
- Participation in school, community, service, civic and religious organizations is substantially (1.9 times) higher. Leadership in these organizations is particularly (3.2 times) greater.
- Community involvement is significantly greater. For example, attendance at community meetings is 2.6 times greater.
- Neighborhood interactions and trust are significantly higher.

<https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>

And here is what I have realized over the years that I have spent advocating for Vermonters. It really comes down to one question. *Is it important that Vermonters have access to affordable public higher education?* If it is, this isn't just a one-time bridge fund to support. It is a commitment to the system that is here for the good of Vermont. If your vote doesn't support funding the budget of the Vermont State Colleges to at least the level of our neighboring states, which is 31% compared to the current 17%, then you need to own that decision. You need to admit that you do not support affordable public higher education for Vermonters. You need to realize that this decision will send even more of our young people out-of-state. And you need to live with the fact that you have allowed the Vermont State Colleges and the communities where we reside to suffer because of the lack of your commitment.

Please make your decision for the public good.

Thank you.

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