From: Mills, Bryan
Subject: COMMENTARY -- VT Secretary of State -- Get Out There and Vote!
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Please see a commentary by Vermont Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas below.

Get Out There and Vote!

As Vermont's Secretary of State and Chief Elections Officer, it's my job to help sustain and defend democracy – the form of government in which we the people choose our leaders and decide issues by voting. I believe that democracy must not only be defended; our participation in it must be grown, which is why I'm focused on engaging and empowering Vermonters to vote in our upcoming March 5th elections.

When polls close on March 5th, we will begin tallying votes on issues as lofty as who Vermont wants to nominate to be our next president and as close to home as who will be our next school director or selectboard member. And while TV, radio, and news media are saturated with coverage of presidential campaigns, the issues you see on your Town Meeting ballot will have a much more immediate impact on your community. Will the voters choose to purchase a new fire truck? Will our budget cover the cost of after school programs for our children? Will we put a new roof on our library? How much will we raise in taxes to pay for these investments?

Democracy is about people. It is about voters and citizens of course, but it's also about the workers, volunteers, and other participants that make the systems of democracy work. Municipal clerks are the keystone of our democracy, and their communities count on them to support the whole process! Your Board of Civil Authority (BCA) plays a critical role in maintaining the integrity of elections, while poll workers and other volunteers make sure Election Day runs smoothly, ballots get counted, and every eligible Vermonter has the opportunity to vote.

As you exercise your right to vote – whether filling out your ballot at home or voting in-person at your town's floor meeting or at the polls – take a minute to appreciate all the people and systems that make it possible. We can't take the right, or the people and systems, for granted!

If all you listen to is national media, or rarely stray beyond the social media algorithm that feeds you news as you scroll, you might believe that the fabric of civic life is fraying. On some days, disheartened, I can see why people say that. But then I spend an afternoon with a town clerk who is dedicated to their community, with a classroom full of engaged students in a high school social studies class, with a citizen legislator in the halls of the State House talking about a constituent concern, or with the passionate host of a community access television station, and I am re-energized and re-focused. I ask you to look for instances where democracy is working in your everyday life and cherish it: a notice of a public hearing; the Front Porch Forum posting about a local candidate; a letter to the editor in the paper from one of your neighbors; or a bustling town clerk's office.

Vermonters care deeply about their neighbors and their communities. In the run-up to March 5th, I

encourage you to make a plan to vote. Take advantage of the budget informational meeting, look over your town and school reports, and ask who is running for those open seats. If you are a parent, consider bringing your children when you vote, so they can learn that voting is an essential part of being part of a democracy and that it is important to you. Your town or city clerk is a valuable resource, as well as the My Voter Page, a service of the Vermont Secretary of State's Office. If there is any place in America where people can come together across divides to solve problems, it is Vermont. And this gives me hope.

Sarah Copeland Hanzas is Vermont's 39th Secretary of State. She was a teacher, coach, small business owner and an 18-year member of the Vermont House before being elected as Secretary of State in 2022.

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