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Irene and Jobs, a Record of Results

MAY 5 - MONTPELIER - **"We face two challenges this year: to rebuild this state better than Irene found us, and to continue to build our bright jobs future.**

To those who say we can't do both at the same time, I say: we must."

Gov. Peter Shumlin, Budget Address to the Legislature, Jan. 12, 2012

Five months ago, when Governor Shumlin addressed the General Assembly in his state of the state and budget addresses, he described a state that had overcome unprecedented hardship in the wake of Tropical Storm Irene but still faced major challenges: continuing to rebuild the state's devastated infrastructure while focusing on creating a bright jobs future for Vermont. As the governor said in January, the legislature would make the tough decisions required this session to rebuild in Irene's aftermath while also investing in economic opportunities for Vermonters.

With the legislative biennium drawing to a close, the governor and the legislature have delivered on that promise. The governor's jobs agenda for the biennium - controlling health care costs and taking the burden of insurance off the backs of small businesses, invigorating our agricultural renaissance, extending broadband internet statewide by the end of 2013, claiming our energy independence, creating educational opportunities for our students, and rebuilding our state better than Irene found us - was delivered by legislative action. With few exceptions - most notably the legislature's disappointing lack of action to streamline permitting and curb our prescription drug epidemic - the 2011-2012 legislative biennium was a remarkable success:

Agenda: "Today, I present a budget that makes the necessary choices to match our spending with Vermonters' ability to pay. This is a balanced budget that protects our most vulnerable, strategically invests new dollars in making Vermont the education state, and builds on our strong jobs future. ... I remain determined not to increase broad-based taxes on Vermonters as we begin to see signs of modest economic growth."

Result: A responsible state spending plan that lives within available revenues and without raising any broadbased taxes. The budget we passed provides funding for a variety of Irene-related expenses, fully funds pension plans and the State's share of education funding, builds reserves to help offset the most egregious federal funding cuts and economic downturns, protects the most vulnerable Vermonters, and supports innovative efforts to increase jobs.

Agenda: "We will not return to the State Hospital, whose decrepit condition did not dignify our most vulnerable Vermonters or high quality of care provided by our state employees."

Result: Strengthened Vermont's mental health system, shifting care from an obsolete institution-based system to a more individual-focused, community-based focus. Under the new law, acute in-patient care will be provided at the Brattleboro Retreat, the Rutland Regional Medical Center and Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington, as well as a new 16-25 bed secure facility to be located near the Central Vermont Medical Center in Berlin. In addition, services that enable individuals to remain in their communities will be increased, local emergency services expanded, and support for effective programs helping those with mental health conditions strengthened. The administration also brought the Agencies of Natural Resources and Transportation together in Montpelier to ensure cooperation on projects moving forward; and consolidated Education in downtown Barre and Human Services in downtown Waterbury, supporting those local economies.

Agenda: “Vermont’s transportation infrastructure pre-Irene was crumbling before our eyes. We will take the lessons from Irene to rebuild our roads, bridges, and rail stronger, faster, and more affordably.”

Result: A \$658 million Transportation Budget – the largest in the state’s history – that will repair and replace damaged and aging roads, bridges and railroads to ensure businesses, tourists and the public enjoy safe and smooth travel.

Agenda: “With over 600 historic buildings in our downtowns flooded by Irene, many Vermonters who were put out of work are counting on us. I am proposing an additional \$500,000 in downtown tax credits. Each dollar leverages 16 additional dollars in job creation, and every million dollars creates 110 new jobs.”

Result: A \$500,000 tax credit program to help restore businesses located in historic downtowns damaged in Irene re-open and get Vermonters back to work. Also for businesses, imposed a moratorium on the ‘Cloud Tax’ on internet-based services to help Vermont companies that rely on that delivery system, and eliminated the tax on packaging equipment to reduce costs on Vermont’s manufacturing firms.

Agenda: “To the hundreds of Vermonters who lost so much – lost their house, lost their belongings, lost the land that their homes rested on or the land they tilled, we stand with you in the long recovery that lies ahead, to help you close the gap between your hopes and dreams that were washed away and the paltry \$30,200 maximum reimbursement afforded you by our federal government.”

Result: Covered the entire cost of rebuilding for towns hardest-hit by Irene, provided half of the town match for transportation costs created by the storm, helped remove destroyed mobile homes and ensured those located in flood plains are able to move to a safer location through a buy-out program in partnership with municipalities, and created the VT Strong license plate to raise \$1 million to help families impacted by Irene.

Agenda: “If we can turn the lights back on in just three days for over 70,000 utility customers, we can create jobs by harnessing the sun, wind, water, forests and fields to produce community-generated renewable power.”

Result: Approved legislation to expand clean, renewable energy sources across the state – creating quality jobs across the spectrum, including transportation, engineering, manufacturing, and more.

Agenda: “Building the best education system in the country will create jobs. However, we have to have the courage to do some things differently. We must start by elevating the Commissioner of Education to the Secretary of Education, appointed by the governor.”

Result: As of Jan. 1, 2013, the Department of Education becomes an official state agency, with the Secretary of Education appointed by the governor – a change sought by businesses across the state as they seek an educated, highly skilled workforce. This change will strengthen education and help prepare young Vermonters for the global economy. In addition, provided property tax relief by earmarking 50 percent of any surplus to the Education Fund. In addition, provided \$2 million to open Community College of Vermont and Vermont State College programs in Brattleboro, a town that has been devastated by recent flooding and a significant fire.

Agenda: “If we can rebuild our transportation infrastructure at 35 cents on the dollar, we can lead the nation in arresting the skyrocketing cost of health care that is hurting job growth and picking the pockets of our struggling middle class.”

Result: the Legislature approved an ‘exchange’ to offer comparable insurance plans at competitive prices to Vermont families and businesses with 50 or fewer employees. This was a critical step in Vermont’s steady progress toward becoming the first state to provide universal access to affordable, quality coverage.

Agenda: “If we can reconnect hundreds of miles of washed out dirt roads in just days so that milk trucks can get to our dairy farmers who had to dump milk during the storm, we can create jobs by fueling the renaissance in locally grown Vermont food.”

Result: An approximately \$1.2 million Working Landscapes program to promote Vermont’s working farms and forests, tapping the state’s clean and green reputation to boost our growing value-added agricultural sector and bringing and keeping young Vermonters back into farming.

Agenda: “As a lifelong hunter, I know firsthand how important hunting and fishing is to Vermont’s quality of life and economic success. That is why my budget includes an increase to \$1.5 million to Fish and Wildlife, an investment that leverages nearly \$8 million in federal dollars to ensure a bright future for Vermont’s sportsmen and women.”

Result: A \$1.5 million increase – more than double last year’s budget -- to the Department of Fish and Wildlife to support Vermont’s wildlife-based recreation, which accounts for \$385 million of economic opportunity for our state. This sector not only attracts new visitors to Vermont, but is critical to our hunting and fishing heritage, with Vermont ranking third in the nation in wildlife recreation.

“Having witnessed what Vermont can do together, I have never been more optimistic about our ability to keep getting tough things done to help us grow jobs in 2012.”