

Thank you to the NEK Collaborative for the opportunity to say a few words today.

I'm sorry I cannot personally welcome you to the Office and the State House.

I'd like to begin by recognizing newly elected Representative, Katherine Sims, for her leadership as the former Executive Director of the NEK Collaborative. I met Katherine last year and remain inspired by her leadership as an unwavering voice for the Northeast Kingdom and Vermont's rural communities. Congratulations to Tom Levett on your new position and I look forward to working with you and the NEK Collaborative.

I believe it was Senator Aiken in 1949 who gave name to the Northeast Kingdom when he warned that if the railroad wasn't maintained in St. Johnsbury that we would be speaking of the "Forgotten Kingdom" not the Northeast Kingdom.

His warning and words could not ring more true today.

Over the last 10 years the Northeast Kingdom has experienced a 2.4% population decline, 48% of addresses still don't have access to high-speed internet and 15% of residents live in poverty.

This pandemic has exposed what Vermonters in the Kingdom have known for years: there are deeply rooted inequities in Vermont and history will reflect how, in this moment, we work to address them.

Vermont's future, specifically reversing our population decline and shrinking tax base, depends on us working across party lines and geographic divides. It depends on us working closely with our Congressional Delegation to make strategic economic investments that will ensure our Northeast Kingdom is not the Forgotten Kingdom.

Thank you again for the opportunity to welcome you (virtually) to the State House today.

I look forward to listening to all you have to say and doing my part to support the Northeast Kingdom Recovery Plan which I am pleased to wholeheartedly endorse today.

Thank you!