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To: Coriell, Scott
Subject: Op-Ed from Gov. Peter Shumlin on Legislative Session

Please find the below op-ed from Gov. Peter Shumlin on this year's legislative session.

Thanks,

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Progress for Vermont
By Gov. Peter Shumlin

We convened the legislative session in January with the goal of making this economy work for every single Vermonter and resolving the challenges that undermine our quality of life. It was an agenda focused on jobs, quality of life, our environment, and making Vermont a place that works for everyone, not just those who are already doing well. Five months later, we have taken great steps toward that goal.

We started by passing legislation to bring long-needed resources and tools to clean up Vermont's waterways, including Lake Champlain. Our rivers, lakes, and streams are more than just a part of our everyday life; they help drive economic activity in this state and define who we are as Vermonters. Thanks to the action of the legislature this year, that will remain true for generations to come. The pollution affecting Lake Champlain and other waterways has been generations in the making, and it won't be cleaned up overnight. But we now have the plan and resources to make sure our kids and grandkids continue to enjoy our beautiful waters.

If there was one issue that Vermonters told us they wanted action on this session, it was school spending and property taxes. Vermont's education system is one of the most important aspects of our democracy. But as we have seen student counts continue to drop to the point where we have an average of 4.7 staff to every one student, educational quality has suffered and costs have grown beyond Vermonters' ability to pay. By working together, we passed a once-in-a-generation reform bill that will give our kids higher quality education and bend the cost curve, bringing badly-needed property tax relief to Vermonters.

We also took a giant step forward by charting a cleaner, greener energy future for our state. The legislation passed this year will change the way we do energy in Vermont. Utilities will now be in the businesses of helping customers use new technologies to use less energy, not more. By helping Vermonters to make energy efficient upgrades to their homes and promoting more community-scale renewable energy projects, we will add 1,000 jobs to a clean energy economy that already supports 15,000 jobs, cut our greenhouse gas emissions by 15 million metric tons, and save Vermonters a net of \$390 million on their fuel and energy bills.

At a time when Vermont's unemployment rate is the sixth lowest in America and our businesses have thousands of job openings, we're continuing to invest in economic development. Thoughtful changes to the Vermont's premier economic development incentive program will help us ensure job growth is spread across the state. And we're unleashing more capital for start-up business and helping first-time homebuyers get into a home.

We also took concrete steps to help working Vermonters get ahead and protect those Vermonters who need us most with Child Savings Accounts that will help every kid in this state get a jump start on saving for college. Vermonters will no longer be victimized by rent-to-own schemes that target the most vulnerable among us. And we've strengthened the state's ability to protect our children from abuse and neglect with a comprehensive child safety bill.

Lastly, we came into this session knowing we had to make the difficult decisions to match Montpelier's spending with the growth rate in our economy and close a \$113 million budget gap. The budget is more than just a dollar figure; it provides critical resources to our communities, helping us protect our environment and our most vulnerable. But of all the tough things we did together, crafting an acceptable budget was the most difficult. I appreciate that in the last few days we made additional cuts and came up with a sensible revenue solution to help put Vermont on a fiscally strong foundation for the future. The fact that we did it without raising income, sales, and rooms and meals tax rates or removing the ability to deduct charitable giving and major medical expenses is good Vermont common sense.

I am so proud and privileged to serve as Governor of this great state. This legislative session we faced the major challenges of our state head on. Our job is not done, but the progress we have made will help ensure that we make progress towards an economy that works for every single Vermonter.