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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Hi, Django — This is nice. I did compress it a little here and there and probably should have done a little more, but I love how you draw through lines to issues of youth in Vermont, Scott’s political approaches, and the contrast with Richards. Thanks so much. —Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Richards represents a positive alternative to halfhearted  
2 indifference

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 The Democratic candidate offers a strong vision of the  
4 root issues affecting Vermonters — and a marked contrast from  
5 the governor’s approach of looking good while doing the  
6 minimum

####END SUBHED####

7 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

8 THE APPROACHING election cycle will be a tumultuous,  
9 important time of change in this country, especially here in

10 Vermont, where I see and feel a growing anxiety about the  
11 deterioration of our small communities. It is a crucial opportunity  
12 to elect leaders who will push things in a positive direction.

13         Once again, it is time to elect a governor who will show  
14 up and innovate for Vermont. There is no question in my mind  
15 that the woman for the job is Aly Richards.

16         When I met her recently, I was blown away by her strong  
17 vision of the root issues affecting Vermonters and how clearly she  
18 was able to discuss attacking them.

19         I also was moved by Ali's capacity to listen, a quality of  
20 leadership that feels difficult to find these days. In our  
21 conversation, she took notes the whole time in a notebook  
22 already filled with pages upon pages that she had collected in her  
23 short time on the campaign trail.

24         \* \* \*

25         ALY IS THE former CEO of Let's Grow Kids, the  
26 organization that mobilized 40,000 Vermonters to the historic  
27 Child Care Bill (Act 76, passed in 2023).

28         By combining federal and state funding with a strategic  
29 0.44% payroll tax, the law is delivering wins to families and  
30 businesses across the state; approximately 7,500 families now  
31 have access to financial assistance for childcare; state  
32 investments have bolstered the early childhood education  
33 infrastructure, opening hundreds of new spaces and jobs; and  
34 employers can benefit from a more-stable workforce because  
35 employed parents don't need to scramble for childcare.

36         Even though there was a new tax, it was carefully  
37 tailored to fill a gap that ended up providing a net benefit to  
38 businesses reliant on a consistent work force. This is exactly the  
39 sort of leadership that Vermont is crying out for.

40         In a recent forum, Aly made it clear that her policy  
41 approach as governor will be similar to the model she and her  
42 organization used to pioneer the Child Care Bill.

43         "We didn't just raise revenue and hope for the best," she  
44 said. "We identified the problem very clearly; we identified how

45 the return on investment was gonna look; we maximized every  
46 dollar we could, both federally and in state; and then there was a  
47 gap. And then we raised the smartest possible revenue to fill the  
48 gap, in this case a 0.44% payroll tax that garnered support from a  
49 large coalition.”

50 Aly is deeply experienced working in the Vermont  
51 Legislature and has proven herself as a skilled leader; her policy  
52 approach is absolutely solid.

53 \* \* \*

54 IT’S TIME TO ditch the halfhearted indifference that has  
55 kept Republican incumbent Phil Scott in office for five terms,  
56 because his method of managed inaction is delivering no results  
57 at a time when Vermont needs constructive leadership.

58 Scott has proven that his entire goal in office is to keep  
59 things the way they are going: in a clear state of decline.

60 I’m not satisfied.

61 It is heartbreaking to hear many of my high school  
62 friends talk about how excited they are not to live here anymore.  
63 Perhaps it is the ghostly presence of more and more vacant  
64 storefronts downtown, the abundance of familiar houses for sale,  
65 or the barn on Route 5 that was, for the first time in my life,  
66 vacant of cows when I drove by.

67 More than ever, I see economic strain at the forefront of  
68 what we are struggling with here.

69 Yes, many of these issues are the effects of national  
70 trends that extend far beyond the reach of state-level politics, but  
71 at the bare minimum the governor’s office has the capacity to  
72 shape responses to these trends.

73 After a decade, it should be clear that Scott’s  
74 Reaganesque model of limiting government action isn’t serving  
75 us. In fact, any homeowner will tell you that it hasn’t even been  
76 successful at keeping taxes low.

77 The question at this point is not whether we want a  
78 conservative or a progressive, it is whether we want a governor  
79 who is willing to act.

80           We need someone with a plan, someone who operates  
81 with the goal of leading the Legislature instead of stifling and  
82 blaming them, who is willing to use their resources to generate  
83 innovative policy, who shows up and engages the public once in  
84 a while with more than a grumpy Facebook post.

85           \* \* \*

86           I HAVE AT TIMES admired Scott's leadership. He has done  
87 some solid work, and most Vermonters seem to think he's pretty  
88 good. In fact, he constantly ranks as the country's most popular  
89 governor.

90           It is clear to me, however, that support for Scott has  
91 been mistaken for indifference.

92           The main point which everyone singularly seems to think  
93 of when they hear Phil Scott's name is that he did a fantastic job  
94 managing the pandemic. This is true.

95           It is also true that he got much more attention than  
96 Democrats who also managed the pandemic well, because most  
97 other governors in his party were busy resisting lockdown  
98 measures and questioning the legitimacy of medical science.

99           Scott often seems like a sensible, middle-of-the-road guy,  
100 but how much of this is because of how he compares to the  
101 extremists in his party?

102           He got a lot of press for being the first Republican  
103 governor to publicly announce that he voted for Joe Biden  
104 instead of Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

105           That is, in fact, a fantastic example of common sense.  
106 Does it make him the best governor in the nation? Christ, I should  
107 hope not.

108           \* \* \*

109           ASK YOURSELF: "Can I name three substantive things Phil  
110 Scott has done for Vermont besides manage the pandemic well?  
111 What about in his last term?"

112           Scott's approval as a Republican governor in a blue state  
113 is not a mark of good leadership; it is a symptom of the bipartisan  
114 polarity that is pulling this country apart. We gravitate to the idea

115 of leadership that bridges the political divides carved by  
116 polarization, but in this case it hasn't led to any constructive  
117 results. Instead, it has resulted in Scott looking good while doing  
118 the bare minimum.

119 It is also worth noting that Scott has made serious  
120 mistakes. My mother, who was naturalized as a U.S. citizen  
121 seven years ago, recently received a letter from Vermont  
122 Medicaid which asked for proof that she was a citizen.

123 "Did you become a U.S. citizen?" it demanded in bold  
124 lettering. "Tell us by 6/18/2026."

125 We are fortunate that this bears no real consequences  
126 besides some additional paperwork, but it is part of an extremely  
127 damaging shift that left many other families far less lucky.

128 When Scott acquiesced to Trump's demand and handed  
129 over the personal information of 64,000 Vermonters receiving  
130 SNAP benefits, he knowingly contributed to a reality of paranoia  
131 and alienation for low-income immigrant Vermonters.

132 My brother and I were incredibly lucky to have an  
133 immigrant mother and to benefit from SNAP assistance in our  
134 upbringing, but reading that letter momentarily made it feel like  
135 that was somehow wrong and un-Vermont.

136 Scott said he complied because refusal would put  
137 Vermont at risk of unspecified financial sanctions and because  
138 the Trump administration has legal right to the information.

139 Frankly, that reasoning is ridiculous. The decision was  
140 weak, it jeopardized the structure of our communities, and it  
141 should be obvious to an elected official like Scott when the time  
142 comes to stand up to political extortion.

143 \* \* \*

144 THERE SEEMS to be a widely held perception, even among  
145 progressives themselves, that progressive policy and reasonable  
146 taxes exist in opposition. Perhaps there is some aversion to  
147 electing a progressive candidate in Vermont because, despite  
148 progressive values, we fear that if progressive policies actually

149 come to fruition it would impact our tax base to a damaging  
150 degree.

151           Scott’s campaign team will work to mobilize this fear.  
152 The campaign will focus blame on the Democratic majority in  
153 the Legislature for “spending money that we don’t have,” for  
154 hiking costs, for placing the burden of expensive public welfare  
155 projects on taxpayers, for not focusing on the economy, and for  
156 failing to promote affordability.

157           The pocketbook-tinges we all feel at the grocery store  
158 or gas station will be highlighted, and Scott will be framed as a  
159 staunchly common-sense guy who will keep things under  
160 control.

161           Yawn, yawn, yawn.

162           The idea that voters have to choose between policy  
163 innovation and reasonable taxes is another fallacy produced by  
164 the bipartisan gridlock of contemporary America. We’ve become  
165 afraid of “progressivism” because within the polarized confines  
166 of our red-vs.-blue system it has become a buzzword that has lost  
167 its true meaning.

168           At its core, progressivism means that the government can  
169 and should have an active role in bettering the human condition.

170           \* \* \*

171           WE SHOULD BE excited to elect someone like Aly  
172 Richards, who will actively use the office to advance a concrete  
173 policy agenda, because so many methods of progressive policy  
174 innovation can both help the economy and deliver active support  
175 where needed.

176           A paramount example is, again, Vermont’s Child Care  
177 Bill, which Aly brought into reality through an approach that  
178 encapsulates what Vermont needs: calculated policy innovation  
179 that takes everyone’s needs into account.

180           When one removes partisan bias, the choice is clear. Do  
181 we want to elect someone who is unwilling to use the  
182 governorship to do anything beyond the minimum, whose  
183 political approach is managed inaction, who lacks creativity,

184 whose legislative dogma is “no,” and who is colloquially called  
185 “Governor Veto”?

186 Or do we want a leader who has proven that she is  
187 willing to innovate, who has delivered mutually beneficial  
188 results, who wants to creatively lead the Legislature, and who has  
189 a strong vision for Vermont?

190 The choice is with us voters. Let’s make a good one.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

191 **DJANGO GRACE** describes himself as an  
192 environmentalist, skier, chiller, and lifelong Brattleborian. He  
193 graduated from Brattleboro Union High School in 2024 and will  
194 enter his junior year of college at Columbia University this fall.  
195 He plans to study political science and environmental policy, and  
196 eventually hopes to work in the Vermont Legislature.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

198

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

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####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

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###END LOGLINE###