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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

—I’ve determined there is an Edward/Ed Eastman who was constable in Strafford but could not confirm the spelling of Eddy. “Fast Eddie” is the character in the Paul Newman films.

—“Municipalities, she believes, ‘should be able to determine [policy] in line with their local realities rather than having legislators who do not even live in these towns dictate rental policies.’” —I believe that this is because Vermont is a Dillon Rule state, which means that towns can’t presume rights that aren’t explicitly spelled out in state law. If that’s the case, she’s in good company complaining about it, but is she actually proposing a solution?



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 ‘What if the systems themselves are the problem?’

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Amanda Janoo, a Democratic Party gubernatorial  
3 hopeful, campaigns in Windham County on a platform of  
4 changing the root causes of bad effects for Vermonters

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6           Since early May, Amanda Janoo has visited Windham  
7 County several times to deliver a message focused on local  
8 control, maximizing resources, and listening to the community.

9           To that end, the 39-year-old Democratic gubernatorial  
10 candidate likes to start the dialogue at her meet-and-greet  
11 gatherings with an invitation to audience members to share what  
12 makes them proud of their community.

13           At recent gatherings in Guilford and Putney, an  
14 outpouring of responses — food assistance, the local school,  
15 senior gatherings, and so on — each yielded affirming nods from  
16 other attendees.

17           She has come to make her case that public policy should  
18 be viewed through an economist’s lens as an alternative to what  
19 her campaign materials call the “managed decline” offered by  
20 incumbent Republican Gov. Phil Scott.

21           Her alternative approach is “the work I know how to do,  
22 and I think that’s the work Vermont needs now,” she said to  
23 prospective voters in Putney.

24           Born and raised in Stratford, Vermont, she went through  
25 the Upper Valley public schools before moving on to Macalester  
26 College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she majored in political  
27 science with a focus in political economy. While there she spent  
28 a year at Oxford University studying politics, philosophy, and  
29 economics.

30           After college, Janoo became a Fulbright research scholar;  
31 she earned an M.Phil from Cambridge University in economic  
32 development, and she worked for the United Nations Industrial  
33 Development Organization, as she says, “helping governments  
34 build resilient and diversified economies that could generate  
35 good jobs and broad-based prosperity.”

36           Janoo’s recent work has been at the Wellbeing Economy  
37 Alliance, a United Kingdom-based organization focused “on  
38 helping high-income countries [...] evaluate their economies by  
39 their contribution to social and ecological well-being (rather than  
40 to stock market values or GDP growth rates).

41 The Vermont chapter — which she co-founded and for  
42 which she works still part-time while waging her campaign — is  
43 “a broad coalition working to transform Vermont’s economy into  
44 a sustainable, prosperous system that benefits everyone who calls  
45 Vermont home.”

46 On the boards of Rights & Democracy and the Vermont  
47 chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, Janoo is a steering  
48 committee member of Fund Vermont’s Future, a coalition  
49 working to reform Vermont’s tax system so it is fairer, more  
50 affordable for working families, and able to fund the services  
51 Vermonters rely on from schools and healthcare to housing and  
52 climate resilience.

## 53 **How she got started**

54 At a gathering of approximately 60 people at the Putney  
55 Public Library on May 31, Janoo told her audience that her sense  
56 of mission was shaped and interest piqued when she’d “attend  
57 Town Meeting with my family every year and watch my  
58 community debate and decide on everything from how much  
59 money should go into schools or roads to whether there should  
60 be nuclear reactors in our state or [whether] ‘Fast Eddie’ [was]  
61 going to be our constable again that year.”

62 That, she said, “was my introduction to politics and to  
63 economics. That’s how I learned that these systems only work  
64 best when they’re locally rooted and genuinely govern for the  
65 people.”

66 Janoo told *The Commons* that when she was young, her  
67 father, a civil engineer, held multiple jobs to augment that  
68 income while her mother ran a small tax preparation and  
69 accounting business to supplement income.

70 Neighbors in Vermont looking out for one another “was  
71 very much part of my entry into this world,” said Janoo,  
72 recounting an act of kindness that happened to her parents and  
73 her two older siblings when her mother was pregnant with her.

74 The family was renting “a tiny little house on a farm in  
75 Norwich,” she said. “One of their neighbors must have noticed  
76 they were struggling financially because he dropped off a side of  
77 beef at the house.”

78 Her family lived off of the beef “for quite a few months,”  
79 Janoo said.

80 “But that’s Vermont, right? We look out for each other,  
81 neighbors show up for each other, and I’m so grateful for that,  
82 because I think that that’s what’s going to get us through all of this  
83 ahead,” she said.

84 Janoo moved back to Vermont permanently in 2018,  
85 “because this is home and the place that I want to live for the rest  
86 of my life.”

87 Seeing the state of the state — that “our healthcare  
88 system is collapsing and our communities are being hollowed out  
89 because nobody can afford to live here anymore” — she was  
90 motivated to run for governor, she said.

## 91 **Focused on inequality**

92 To the gathering in Putney, she said that “the thing that  
93 gives me hope is that Vermont has never been a place where we  
94 accept our fate to be dictated by the powers that be.”

95 “When I went out into the world and started working on  
96 economic policy, I realized there were a lot of people who  
97 seemed to think the economy is something abstract, beyond our  
98 control,” she said.

99 Those people, she continued, think “that the best thing  
100 government can do is just take a hands-off approach, encourage  
101 large investors or corporations to jump in, and trust that the  
102 wealth they’re going to generate is going to trickle down and  
103 benefit everyone.”

104 “Now, obviously, it hasn’t trickled, which is how it’s  
105 possible that we live in the richest country in history and the  
106 majority of us are struggling to afford basic needs like healthcare,  
107 housing, and food,” Janoo said.

108 As an economist with a well-regarded background in  
109 leadership and policy-making, she said that in this country, “we  
110 designed a system where it’s easier to make money off of money  
111 than from hard work.”

112 “[It’s a] system that concentrates wealth and power as  
113 opposed to distributing it,” she explained. “And a system where  
114 the things we need are really expensive and the stuff we don’t  
115 really need is super cheap, right? We’re hearing a lot of people  
116 talk about affordability and for good reason.”

117 We’re now in a place, she said, where entities can  
118 “charge as much as they want for housing, energy, healthcare,  
119 and people have to pay it.”

120 There is no option, she asserted, “until we reach a  
121 breaking point. And I think we’re at that breaking point now”  
122 where average citizens have to choose between mortgage  
123 payments and healthcare.

124 Janoo rents. And where she lives in Burlington, “on  
125 average my rent has increased about \$100 a year, but I should  
126 note that in certain years, my landlords (as the building has  
127 changed ownership and management a few times) have been  
128 willing to negotiate the proposed increase.”

129 She said she doesn’t think such negotiation “would have  
130 been possible if I lived in an apartment owned by one of large  
131 property management conglomerates in Burlington.”

132 Having long understood conceptually “that our  
133 economic system was broken, living in it has been something  
134 else entirely.”

135 And so she said she aims to prove that a “different  
136 economic and political system is possible” as she employs skills  
137 and insights gained in her career “to help build the movement we  
138 need to push for major economic policy changes here.”

139 One example, she says: Towns and cities, like Burlington,  
140 “should be able to advance rent stabilization policies without  
141 having to go through the Legislature.”

142 Municipalities, she believes, “should be able to  
143 determine [policy] in line with their local realities rather than  
144 having legislators who do not even live in these towns dictate  
145 rental policies.”

## 146 **Doubling the message**

147 At all of Janoo’s regional gatherings to date, the wish  
148 most often heard from her audiences is that Scott be replaced.

149 Democratic gubernatorial candidate Aly Richards, whom  
150 Janoo will face in the Aug. 11 party primary, shares that goal.

151 The two aspiring party nominees are crafting a positive  
152 and civil rivalry as they keep that big picture in mind.

153 “I think it’s wonderful,” Janoo said in Putney. “We’ve got  
154 two cool ladies running, trying to take on Phil Scott.”

155 For her part, Richards told *The Commons* recently: “It’s  
156 amazing that we have a friendly primary, and I think Amanda and  
157 I are going to show something really great here: two women  
158 putting themselves out there with good ideas, having a  
159 reasonable debate, putting a choice out for the voter, and not  
160 tearing each other down. I think that’s going to be a great model  
161 for unity and democracy.”

162 Noting distinctions between herself and Richards, she  
163 added, “I think for Aly, it’s ‘How do we better manage these  
164 systems that we have? Because Scott’s not doing a good job.’ For  
165 me, I’m asking a deeper question[s]: ‘What if the systems  
166 themselves are the problem? And how do we transform those  
167 systems from the bottom up as opposed to the top down, starting  
168 really with community and self-determination, democracy, and  
169 economic development?’”

170 “I believe a lot of the struggles we’re facing are economic  
171 in nature, and so being able to speak to how we solve housing  
172 affordability and healthcare and all interconnected issues around  
173 the cost of living,” said Janoo.

174 Having traveled across the state, Janoo has heard  
175 Vermonters express anger around Scott’s apparent stance on AI  
176 development given his recent veto of the AI data center bill.

177 The bill, sponsored by independent Rep. Laura Sibilila of  
178 Dover, was supported by a majority of legislators, but  
179 Republicans stood firm in sustaining Scott’s veto, causing the  
180 Democrats’ efforts to fall short of an override.

181 And, she added, “people are really pissed about the  
182 education bill.” Even though forced consolidation has been taken  
183 off the table, Scott is still “taking away towns’ capacity to  
184 determine their own school budgets.”

185 Janoo said Scott fosters “a concentration of power in  
186 Montpelier without actually giving any support back to the local  
187 communities. [...] There are a lot of top-down directives and not  
188 enough bottom-up decision-making.”

189 She cautioned about “the dangers of such concentration  
190 of power” as seen now on a national scale.

191 “People I know who voted for Phil Scott say, ‘Oh, he’s  
192 going to keep our taxes down,’” she said in Putney. “Well, I’m  
193 sorry, but who here thinks your property taxes have gone down?”

194 “It just hasn’t happened,” Janoo said.

## 195 **Proactive, not reactive**

196 From the first few months on the campaign trail, Janoo  
197 has seen that “people are yearning for something that feels  
198 proactive and not reactive.”

199 “We now have over 700 volunteers, many who have  
200 never been involved in any sort of politics before, so there’s  
201 energy and enthusiasm that’s here right now that I think will  
202 penetrate,” he said.

203 She hopes that energy will resonate with and reach  
204 disappointed supporters of Scott, who last won re-election by  
205 almost 72% of the vote.

206 “I think he’s eroding a lot of his base,” said Janoo,  
207 describing a weakening that’s exacerbated by “the realities of the  
208 economic insecurity we’re facing.”

209 Janoo explained to *The Commons* that she proposes that  
210 “Vermont lead the nation by guaranteeing every resident access  
211 to free, high-quality primary and preventive healthcare by  
212 bringing small town doctors, nurses and mental health  
213 practitioners back to our communities.”

214 “Inspired by towns like Stratford and Tunbridge that have  
215 hired their own town nurses in response to our healthcare crisis,  
216 I’ve proposed a state-funded universal primary care system” to be  
217 funded by the proposed Fair Share for Vermont program, she said.

218 The funding bill has proposed add two new personal tax  
219 brackets to capture more state tax revenue from the wealthiest  
220 Vermonters. It stalled in the House Ways and Means Committee  
221 in the past session.

222 Despite that setback, “this [primary-care system]  
223 proposal is very scalable, allowing us to start with a few towns to  
224 show proof of concept as we move towards universal coverage of  
225 the state,” she said.

226 Janoo knows that “in order to move to a fully universal  
227 healthcare system not dependent on federal funding “we would  
228 need to partner with other states. A New England-wide alliance  
229 would make the most sense in terms of geographic proximity but  
230 it depends,” on states’ leadership, she said.

231 “We talk about our schools being so important to our  
232 communities, but the argument that the way to reduce property  
233 taxes is through school consolidation rather than through  
234 property tax reform seems counterintuitive to me,” Janoo said.

235 What needs to be addressed, she said, are the “root  
236 drivers” of increased education spending.

237 Among those drivers are “healthcare and mental health  
238 support for kids. Those should be the things that we’re focusing  
239 on [...] for our young people and for all of our families.”

240 Janoo told *The Commons* that, based on discussions with  
241 constituents and broad-based concern about protecting their rural  
242 schools, every community she’s visited “has emphasized that  
243 their small schools are not only important for their children’s  
244 education,” but they are “the glue for their communities.”

245 Thus, she reported that she’s working with appropriate  
246 professionals “on a proposal through which community schools  
247 lean into their function as community hubs by working with  
248 families, local organizations, and the state to integrate healthcare,  
249 social services, food banks, childcare, continuing adult education  
250 and other youth development and community engagement  
251 services.”

252 That new use of public space would allow “a broader  
253 range of budget streams to be directed to revitalizing and  
254 supporting communities across our state,” Janoo said.

255 This community school model that “supports the ‘whole  
256 child’ by addressing both in-school and out-of-school barriers to  
257 learning,” she said.

## 258 **A different approach to the** 259 **housing crisis**

260 Of the state’s affordable housing deficit, Janoo pointed  
261 out that “because Scott is a contractor, a lot of his housing policy  
262 has been oriented towards what is going to be good for larger  
263 contractors.”

264 Tradespeople and building firms are necessary to build  
265 housing in the state, but such policy is not what’s going to solve  
266 the housing crisis, she said.

267 “My mom lives up in the Northeast Kingdom now,”  
268 Janoo said. “During Covid, [many] people moved onto her small  
269 dirt road; then after Covid, they left.”

270 But as the new out-of-state property owners returned to  
271 their primary properties while the nation reopened post-

272 pandemic, they didn't sell their Vermont homes. They held onto  
273 them as vacation and short-term rental investment properties.

274 Janoo's mother "now only has one neighbor who lives  
275 near her all year round," she said. "For a state that talks about  
276 how important community is, that's very concerning."

277 Only a small percentage of Vermonters "would even be  
278 eligible for a loan for a new house," the candidate noted,  
279 asserting that investors and wealthy individuals are increasingly  
280 the only ones with means to buy housing.

281 "So we need to first stop private equity and corporate  
282 ownership of the housing stock," to disincentivize such use and  
283 "to provide more incentives for people to build their own  
284 houses."

285 To ensure that Vermont has more resources to put into  
286 permanently affordable housing for Vermonters now and in the  
287 future, Janoo would limit private equity and large corporate  
288 ownership of the housing stock, she told the *The Commons*.

289 The candidate would tax second homes, vacation rentals,  
290 and luxury estates to reduce the property tax burden on primary  
291 residents. She said she would use public funds to support housing  
292 trusts, co-ops, public housing, senior living, personal building  
293 loans, and rehabilitation grants.

294 She would also support allowing towns and other  
295 municipalities to advance rent control and stabilization without  
296 having to get permission from the Legislature. She endorses  
297 reducing the cost of building through vocational training, through  
298 building trades apprenticeships, and through producing more  
299 building materials in Vermont.

## 300 **Act 181 and local control**

301 Janoo was asked in Putney about Vermont's Act 181,  
302 summarized on [ruralvermontrising.org](http://ruralvermontrising.org) as "a major update to  
303 Vermont's land use framework that changes how and where  
304 development is regulated across the state."

305 The new law does not replace Act 250, the state’s  
306 landmark and famously complex and stringent environmental  
307 protection law. “It broadens the situations in which the Act 250  
308 permitting process is triggered,” Janoo said.

309 After a groundswell of opposition to Act 181’s proposed  
310 measures, the Legislature passed a bill this session that partially  
311 repeals the overhaul. As of June 15, Scott has not signed or  
312 vetoed the bill.

313 Sharing that she sees room for Act 250 reform, Janoo  
314 elaborated with *The Commons* that her stance on Act 181 “is to  
315 do a full repeal and start over with a genuinely participatory  
316 process.”

317 With Act 181 and Act 73 — the 2024 law that proposes  
318 sweeping consolidation of the state’s school districts and other  
319 education reform — Janoo also sees a larger issue unfolding.

320 Both laws, she said, “reflect a broader pattern of  
321 Montpelier imposing policies and maps on communities that are  
322 not reflective of their values or priorities.”

323 “Vermont has an incredibly strong civic culture, and  
324 people are demanding to be a part of policies that will impact  
325 their communities and support walkable village centers that have  
326 thriving small businesses, schools, small town doctors, libraries,  
327 affordable housing and community spaces,” Janoo said.

328 Looking at the bigger picture, she added that some of the  
329 anger around Act 181 has been fueled by out-of-state actors like  
330 the Koch network, an array of right-wing political organizations  
331 and enterprises that founded and fund groups — like Vermonters  
332 for American Prosperity — to fight government regulations that  
333 are not aligned with large corporate interests.

334 “So, now is a moment for bottom-up decision-making  
335 and to acknowledge the wisdom of both environmental experts  
336 and rural communities, hunters, and farmers who have been  
337 long-time stewards of this land,” Janoo said.

338 She also sees “a need for us to produce more of [what]  
339 we need ourselves.”

340 As small businesses close up shop, she discusses  
341 community wealth building.

342 “That’s where you keep more money circulating within  
343 your local economies by supporting small businesses,” Janoo  
344 said.

345 “When you buy milk from one of your farms, the farmer  
346 uses that money to buy some hay” locally and the hay farmer  
347 spends it on another local resource, she explained.

348 Soon, “that dollar gets turned into \$4 before it flows  
349 out.”

350 “If you buy something on Amazon, that dollar’s  
351 immediately gone, right?” Janoo said, describing “incentives to  
352 keep more money flowing within our local economies and  
353 strengthening some of those linkages” as “a really important  
354 strategy for fostering more broad-based, equitable development  
355 and supporting our smaller businesses.”

## 356 **Fighting cynicism**

357 At the Putney gathering, Janoo was asked by Brattleboro’s  
358 Django Grace, just home from college and among the curious,  
359 how she would attract young people to come to or stay in the  
360 state.

361 “I think we need to get young people more engaged in  
362 this campaign and in politics,” Janoo said. “Dispelling nihilism is  
363 key, too: “that sense that electoral politics doesn’t do anything.”  
364 And then “we have to deal” with the issues at hand: education,  
365 health, housing, the environment.”

366 “I, like most many Vermonters, left in search of  
367 opportunities, and then came back because I love it,” she said.

368 She acknowledged that “it’s very hard to live here.”

369 “Personally, I’m a renter, and I just, like, doom-scroll  
370 Zillow looking at houses in Stratford that I’m never going to be  
371 able to afford because I have too much student loan debt,” Janoo  
372 said.

373 The candidate has been around the state and reports  
374 support and surprises.

375 At the Farmers Market in Hardwick, Janoo connected  
376 with folks from all walks of life “and I was really surprised when  
377 a local police officer said, ‘You know, I’ve always voted for Scott,  
378 but we need new thinking. This isn’t working.’”

379 “So I think there is, across a wide range of different types  
380 of folks, a recognition of a need for us to make a change,” Janoo  
381 said. “The biggest barrier we face right now is cynicism: a belief  
382 that it can never be better than what it is now.”

383 After a recent speaking engagement, Janoo said a young  
384 woman approached her and said, “Thank you so much. I’ve been  
385 feeling so overwhelmed by our political situation, and you’ve  
386 given me some hope, you know.”

387 Preserving and strengthening democracy is paramount  
388 for Janoo: Thus, her focus on participatory decision making. As a  
389 model, the country of Wales has inspired her.

390 “They went through a process of asking their citizens:  
391 What kind of Wales do you want to leave for your children and  
392 grandchildren?” she said.

393 “And on that basis, they articulated seven long-term  
394 well-being goals that were centered in health and equity,  
395 community, culture, biodiversity, global responsibility, and  
396 prosperity. In the end, every government expenditure proposed  
397 has to prove it would contribute to all seven goals.”

398 In short, she says, “in a moment of democratic crisis, I  
399 believe we need to be advancing new systems of governance that  
400 engage citizens directly in strategy design and policymaking so it  
401 reflects the public will and local context.

402 “We need to make sure every Vermonter is safe and  
403 secure in their basic needs so we can get to the hard work of  
404 saving our democracy,” Janoo said. “We need states to stand up  
405 and come together, create coalition, and push back on our  
406 federal government.”

407 The candidate said that federal turmoil “is not going to  
408 stop unless we stop it.”

409 “And I believe that together we have everything we  
410 need, but it’s just going to require us all to be aggressively  
411 generous with our time, our skills, our resources to make sure  
412 that we not only get through the storms ahead, but lay a  
413 foundation for a much better future to come as well,” Janoo told  
414 attendees.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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415 For more information about Janoo, visit her campaign  
416 [website](#). A [profile](#) of candidate Aly Richards, Janoo’s opponent for  
417 the Democratic Party nomination, appeared in the May 27 issue.

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

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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