

Governor Jim Douglas's Adjournment Address to the Vermont Legislature

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

When we returned to Montpelier in January for the second half of this biennium, there was little doubt that this would be the most challenging year in recent memory.

As our state and nation slowly emerge from the deepest and longest recession since the Second World War, our most critical task is to restart the engine of our economy and set Vermont on a sustainable fiscal path.

The urgency of our efforts is heightened by the knowledge that many of our friends and neighbors are working longer hours for lower wages and that others are out of work altogether.

The economic upheaval Vermonters have experienced has contributed to serious troubles in our state's fiscal situation. But despite these challenges, we can feel good about the work done here, under the Golden Dome, in 2010.

While other states are cutting programs and raising taxes in response to the fiscal crisis, Vermont, I am proud to say, is moving in a different direction. We are looking toward the future and striving for economic success.

We are reforming government through Challenges for Change; we undertook overdue changes in our unemployment insurance and pension systems; we protected vital human services programs for the most vulnerable and indeed strengthened many programs through innovation; and we've done so while making investments in society's most critical safety net – a strong economy.

Reinstating the 40 percent capital gains exemption for employers sends a powerful signal to job creators that Vermont is open for business: that we are listening and we are committed to competing in the global economy.

That change, coupled with the estate tax rollback, increasing the cap in the Vermont Employment Growth Incentive and the \$8.7 million jobs bill enacted earlier this session – with money for job training, telecommunications, small business lending, farmers and tourism – is an important start on the road to full fiscal health.

Putting our UI trust fund back on stable ground was necessary to return certainty to our economy and our state budget. We knew a solution would be difficult – requiring compromise and sacrifice from all sides. I am proud that we worked together to achieve a solution that charts a course for solvency. Shoring up the UI trust fund this year was the right thing to do.

Despite our fiscal challenges, we again renewed our commitment to the Road to Affordability, building a safe and healthy infrastructure through another strong Transportation Bill. I was proud to celebrate, just this week, a record paving budget that will improve our roads and create jobs throughout our state.

After decades of hard work by many, truck weight limits on our Interstate system were finally lifted – helping to get heavy trucks off town roads and out of our village centers and giving a needed boost to our economy.

In addition to a robust investment in our roads, bridges and culverts, we passed a commonsense ban on texting while driving – making our roadways safer for all Vermonters and those who visit the Green Mountains.

A commitment to a cleaner environment is part of who we are as Vermonters. That strong environmental ethic goes hand in hand with our desire to ensure a healthy and competitive economy.

Through the Capital Bill we are investing in geothermal heating at state facilities to reduce the cost to taxpayers and reduce emissions.

Earlier this year Vermont secured a significant portion of our energy future through a long-term power contract with our friends to the north. That agreement benefits from the energy bill that was passed by this General Assembly, which recognizes power from Hydro-Quebec as renewable. Vermont is now positioned to reap greater benefits from our strong relationship with Quebec.

Restructuring our judiciary is critical to ensuring that Vermonters have timely access to justice. I commend Chief Justice Reiber for conveying the urgency of this challenge and offering a way to achieve savings through unification of the court system. The judicial restructuring effort will ensure that our courts remain open, our system is strong and its cost is sustainable.

As we struggle to do what is right for those we serve, I remain humbled by and grateful for those brave Vermonters serving our nation overseas, defending the very ideals of self-government. That is why I am proud that you have passed and I signed the Military Parents' Rights Act. Ensuring that the men and women serving our country have greater certainty in their family circumstances is a small, but important commitment to them. We continue to pray and hope for the safe return of those brave Vermonters deployed overseas.

As we end this session, I want to recognize and thank those throughout state government who work every day to better our great state.

And I want to thank each of you for your dedication to the people you serve and the state we love so very much. At times we've had our differences, but Vermonters can be proud that we conducted the people's business with a strong sense of duty, a commitment to do what is right and the civility that should always be expected from elected leaders.

I first took my seat in this General Assembly in 1973 and have devoted my adult life to advancing the cause of the people of Vermont. There is always more to be done and the challenges facing our state remain daunting. I am proud of what we have accomplished, together, for those we have the honor to serve.

Thank you all.